



PRESENTED TO THE LIBRARY
OF
PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
BY
Mrs. Alexander Proudfit.

THE
RESURRECTION
OF
JESUS CHRIST
HISTORICALLY AND LOGICALLY VIEWED.

Καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς.

BY
RICHARD W. DICKINSON, D. D.

PHILADELPHIA:
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,
No. 821 CHESTNUT STREET.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1865, by

THE TRUSTEES OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Eastern District
of Pennsylvania.

STEREOTYPED BY WESTCOTT & THOMSON.

PREFACE.

THE following pages are submitted to the public in the hope that they may serve, at least in some degree, to supply a want, which, though seldom expressed, is often felt. The want, here assumed, as the conscious experience of not a few minds, is that of some treatise on the Resurrection of Christ, which, while excluding all that is irrelevant, without omitting anything essential to the fair discussion of the subject, shall, in a brief and convenient form, embody the facts and testimony in the case; and which, in vindicating the credibility of the witnesses, shall rebut the positions, and expose the sophistries of Infidelity.

Such a work, it is hoped, will not merely attract the notice of those who have no leisure for investigating the documentary proofs of our holy religion, but will also furnish material for reflection on not a few of the most striking incidents of the Gospels, as well as on some of the most humiliating features of our fallen nature.

The natural tendency of a discussion of this nature, and,

by God's blessing, the actual result may be expected to be, to counteract the suggestions of "an evil heart of unbelief;" to aid the inquiries, and solve the doubts of those whose minds have been embarrassed by speculative difficulties; and, though last, not least, to silence, if not convince the skeptic.

R. W. D.

NEW YORK, *July 1st*, 1865.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE PREDICTION.

PAGE

The death of Christ no ordinary event—He might have avoided it—Foretold the manner of his death, and the time of his resurrection—Ability to foretell the time of one's death, not human—His prediction without a parallel—It was not understood by his disciples—Reasons—His enemies not ignorant of Christ's "saying;"—How they reasoned about it—Sought an audience with Pilate—Precautions against the last error—Watch set, and the stone sealed—A timely precaution—Object of the priests and rulers..... 11

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING BODY.

Incidents attending the dawn of the third morning—No guards to be seen—The body of Jesus missing—Agreement of the Sanhedrim and the disciples as to the fact—Official explanation of the mystery—Not even intimated that Christ was not dead when buried—Had he not been, could not have removed the stone himself, and been unobserved—The body either removed or stolen—Must have been done by either his enemies or his friends—His enemies had no motive to take it away—His friends could not, nor had they a motive: they were dispirited and terrified—Could not have been taken without causing some noise—Improbable that the guard slept—Would

not have acknowledged it if they had—Priests put a lie into their mouths to circulate—Subterfuges of infidelity—Parallel between the priests and modern infidels—Repetition of falsehood—Its influence—Readiness of the people to be imposed on—Illustrations—The rulers did not themselves believe the story—took no measures to substantiate the priests' charge, though bound to do so—The crucifixion without a parallel—Design of the priests' story—Exasperated by the reports of the morning—Why they did not embrace the apostles' doctrine—They had nothing to hope, every thing to fear from the part they had taken in effecting Christ's death..... 22

CHAPTER III.

PRESUMPTIVE PROOFS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

No absurdity in the supposition that he had risen—It was not impossible; especially if he was the God-man—It was not improbable that such a person would verify his own saying—In itself not more wonderful than some of his own miracles—A necessity induced for the verification of his plighted word—The absurd position of modern infidelity—No cause is prejudged by the love of truth—Absence of all presumptive proofs fatal to the argument—Apart from the nature of his death, his resurrection was uncalled for—No question of trivial interest—The course of errorists in their assaults on Christianity—Christ's resurrection implies a higher purpose—No necessity for his rising again if he did not die to take away the sin of the world—By whom the fact of his resurrection has been disputed—The disciples had not the advantage of presumptive proofs—Not strange that they did not understand the import of Christ's saying—If Christ rose he would assuredly convince his disciples of the fact—Importance of the strongest possible evidence..... 40

CHAPTER IV.

POSITIVE EVIDENCE.

PAGE

No one saw Christ rise—The guard frightened away by the angel—The women no knowledge of the guard—Their object in going to the sepulchre—Their consternation—Mary and Salome frightened by an angel—Joanna—Mary Magdalene's early visits—The other Mary and Salome—Joanna and other women: their successive visits—John followed by Peter, saw the clothes lying but no angel—John the *first* to believe in an unseen Saviour—Special message for Peter—Christ appeared *first* to Mary Magdalene—Mary and Salome the next witnesses—Peter the next witness—His second visit to the sepulchre was probably the last that was made by either of the disciples—"The two disciples"—The incredulity of the disciples in general—Christ appears to them all, save Thomas—Rebukes their unbelief—Thomas at last convinced—Next appearance on the shore of Tiberias—The incidents of his interview with the fishers—The next meeting was at Galilee—His last appearance was to the apostles—Final interview—Closing scene—Consequent emotions of the apostles..... 52

CHAPTER V.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE WITNESSES.

Four narratives of the same event—Period at which they were written—The narrators would not multiply particulars—They would vary, and yet agree—Omission no contradiction—Unusual circumstances to be taken into view—The mental agitation of the disciples must have been extreme—Naturalness of the narratives—They explain themselves—The testimony of the women all-important—Why the angels appeared only to the women—Their appearance on the occasion appropriate—No mention of Mary the mother

of Jesus—She was no more to the risen Jesus than the other women—A fictitious writer would have differently represented Mary the mother of Jesus—Not known whether he ever appeared to his mother—She is for the first time mentioned in connection with the apostles—When they all were at prayer—A fact to be praised by all who love truth..... 73

CHAPTER VI.

CREDIBILITY OF THE WITNESSES.

They were competent to judge whether Christ was dead—Could not have been deceived as to his death—Not as to the place where his body was laid—Nor mistaken a phantom for reality—Not possible for a number of persons to labour under an illusion at the same time—In this case *eleven* witnesses besides the women—The apostles knew what was indispensable to the competency of a witness—They were neither prejudiced nor credulous—The idea of Christ's rising probably did not occur to their agitated minds—The natural effects of despondency—In view of the evidence, there was no room for doubt—They are again assembled in "that upper room"—Their prayers—The descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost—Speaking with tongues—Preaching in the name of Jesus—Marvellous effect of their preaching—Wonderful change the apostles have undergone—Not to be explained unless Jesus rose from the dead—They could not have been justly charged with either arrogance or dogmatism..... 84

CHAPTER VII.

CHOSEN WITNESSES.

No valid objection—Reasons for selecting certain persons—Unreasonable to suppose that Christ would have appeared to his enemies—His work on earth was finished—Twelve separate witnesses enough—They must have "infallible proofs," and

act according—The apostles' course—Their testimony—Their miracles—Their writings—Corresponding effects—That Christ's enemies did not believe, no disparagement to the apostles' testimony—They knew that Christ had risen—What they did—Moral truth cannot be accompanied with resistless evidence	97
--	----

CHAPTER VIII.

HYPOTHESES OF INFIDELITY.

That the apostles were enthusiasts—But they were not self-moved—Not easily convinced—They acted under authority, and taught only as commanded—They appealed to facts—They were not governed by impulse, or by fancy—Their writings as fresh as ever—Origin and nature of enthusiasm—The apostles spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost—Enthusiasm allies itself with fanaticism—Characteristics of their history of Jesus—The influence of their writings as contrasted with what they themselves were—Their modesty and candour—The case of Paul. The second hypothesis—The crucifixion-scene—No impostor would have broached the story of the resurrection on the spot—Against all experience that twelve men should have united in a falsehood so soon after the tragedy of the cross, and beneath its shadow—Such a story might have been easily refuted, had it been false—It was adverse to all the national sentiments of the Jews—The story could not have originated in a different place and at a later period.....	105
---	-----

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

No accounting for the Christian church and the Christian ordinances unless we admit the truth of what Peter said—That

three thousand were deceived in a day would be a greater miracle than that Christ rose from the dead—The issue met—The apostles either true or false—Their's no story to please The great task—They could not have been ignorant of consequences—They had nothing to gain—If true, everything to lose—Sketch of the apostles—Something more than words demanded—How did the apostles act?—Could not have aimed to deceive—Logical consequences—Christianity has mysteries—It illumines life and immortality—Infidelity to be pitied—The epitaph.....	115
--	-----

CHAPTER X.

The relation of the fact to Christian doctrines—Obvious, yet overlooked or evaded—Examples in illustration--Method of assault on Christianity changed—Object of skeptical theories—Christian doctrines the exponents of Scriptural facts—Logical consequences of rejecting either the facts or the teachings of Christianity—Testimony of the “witness within”—No materials for constructing the history of Jesus—Outline of his character—The Divine perfections largely unknown till Christ appeared—The constitution of his person—Not to be explained—No relief from heavy thoughts but in the light of the resurrection—The Divine-human—Harmony of the sacred writings—Declared by his resurrection to be “The Son of God” with <i>power</i> —If not the Son of God, there is no significancy in his death—Wrong views of Christ's death—His death an act of humiliation—It assures us of eternal life—His mysterious sorrow—But imperfect knowledge in this relation—A great mystery—One thing known—Christ Jesus his own interpreter—The influence of the resurrection on the chosen witnesses—The scandal of the cross—Christ's resurrection the seal and pledge of his people's.....	126
--	-----

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

THE PREDICTION.

THE peculiarities of Christ's ministry which awakened so intense an interest in his person, together with the varied influences which were arrayed against his mission, forbid the supposition that his death could have been an ordinary event.

It was, indeed, no new thing for a man to be crucified. Many a poor criminal had been, without any one near, save the stern executioners of justice; many a one had breathed out his life in agony on the cross, with no one present to drop a tear, much less care for his mangled corse.

Those two malefactors—the one on the right, the other on the left, who cares for them? Who will ever mention their names after their bodies are thrown into ignominious graves? But HE who is suspended *between* those malefactors, ah, never before had the cross borne a man who in all the public acts of his life had seemed to multitudes to be more than man!

It was not an event, therefore, to be either concealed or forgotten. All had heard of Jesus. His name had been often pronounced with awe, or wonder; with sentiments of love, or of hate. The common people had heard him gladly: the lame, the halt, the blind, the sick, the leper,—mothers with their little children; mourners, sorrowing over the grave of an only brother, or an only son, all had blessed him; while many had felt that they were not worthy that he should come under their roof; and others had fondly hoped that it was he that should redeem Israel.

We can readily imagine that the mere intelligence of his arrest for trial occasioned feelings of the most painful suspense in unnumbered minds throughout Judea. But that men, calling themselves priests and rulers could so outrage justice and humanity as to put so good a man to an accursed death, was enough to arouse all Jerusalem to the highest pitch of public excitation. The great city of the Jews is pouring forth its thousands to gather round the brow of that hill; ~~but~~ because *three men* are there to be crucified, but because of THE ONE between the two, whom Pilate had delivered up to be crucified, and over whose head there is written in large letters: “This is he that was born king of the Jews!”

She who bare him is there, and when no longer able to endure the sight is commended by him to the care of one of his disciples. Certain women

who had followed him are there, wringing their hands in anguish of spirit. Peter is there, weeping more bitterly than ever, that he had denied his Lord. Thomas is there, and gives up in despair. Though they are standing in the distance, yet all the disciples are there, to witness the dark scene,—all save one who had already gone out to revenge on himself his betrayal of his Master. His enemies, they who had imprecated his blood on themselves and their children, are there; and they hear from his dying lips that touching prayer of his for their forgiveness. Men of all ranks, and sects, and of different nations, are there. The scribe and the pharisee, the priest and the Levite, the elders and the rulers, the civilian and the soldier, the noble and the base, Jew and Gentile, all are merged in one promiscuous throng; and deep as was the conflict of emotions in their minds as they gazed upon the cross, it was not so great as the difference in their sentiments respecting Him who was heard to exclaim as he gave up the ghost, “It is finished!” a difference, which, though it may still be found among men, does not militate against the fact that he who was born in Bethlehem was put to death on Calvary.

If the multitude on witnessing the wondrous works of his life, often exclaimed, “What manner of man is this?” well may any one while reflecting on the tragic end of his mission inquire, and with the deepest solicitude, what manner of death is

this ? a death without a parallel in the world's history, a death-scene, rather, such as had never been enacted.

No one, however, can candidly examine the particulars of his trial and crucifixion, as furnished by the Evangelists, without perceiving how easy it would have been for him to have avoided the catastrophe.*

He was no stranger to the treacherous intentions of a perfidious disciple ; and though he had enemies he had also friends on whose support he could have relied. Had he returned to Galilee, as he might readily have done, he would have been removed from all danger of personal violence ; or had he even concealed the place of his nightly resort, he might have baffled the evil counsels of the Jewish elders.

But he remained in Jerusalem in the midst of those who, to his certain knowledge, were plotting against his life. He retained Judas about his person, though he knew that he was but waiting an opportunity to betray him. He continued to pass his nights where he knew that Judas might find him. He even rebuked Peter for attempting his rescue from the mob ; and when arraigned for trial, made no defence.

In short, though he was but young, and seemed to have the same ties which bind other men to life ; though he was engaged in a god-like work and had

* John xviii.

won a multitude of hearts ; though he had betrayed no morbid sympathies, nor lack of thoughtfulness ; though, on several occasions of threatened violence to himself, he had retired from observation, and had always been solicitous only for the safety and welfare of others, yet is it a fact that at this juncture he voluntarily neglected to avail himself of any of those precautions which ordinary prudence would have dictated, and which any other man of his nation, if placed in his circumstances, would certainly have adopted. He calmly awaited the developement of the most diabolical plot that malice had ever conceived. He surrendered himself to his accusers without resistance. He submitted to his sentence without appeal. He suffered the death of the cross without a murmur.*

It is at variance with the known laws of our nature that a man in such circumstances should make no effort to save his life ; as it is repugnant to our natural sensibilities that so good a man, one who had never harmed a single being, never cherished a private end, never breathed but for the good of his nation, should be so cruelly put to death.

But on further examination of the evangelic records, it appears that Jesus Christ foresaw and foretold the time and manner of his death ; and, what is still more remarkable, he distinctly said to his disciples that though he should speedily be sub-

* Compare Mark xiv. Luke xxii. xxiii. John xix.

jected to an ignominious death, yet within three days after the event he would be restored to life! "Behold," said he to the twelve, "we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the *third day he shall rise again.*"* Truly a most extraordinary "saying!"

Now every man knows that sooner or later he must die; and one may have an impression that he will die at such a time, and, it may be, in a particular way; and it is possible that the event may indicate the correctness of his forethought. Hence, what are termed "presentiments," which, though common to minds of an imaginative cast, are seldom realized.

Man may have his nervous apprehensions or may indulge in conjecture; but of himself can know neither the time nor the manner of his death. This is so obvious that no one in his senses would ever venture to predict the time and manner of his decease. Even when exposed to imminent peril, whatever may be his thoughts, he cannot say to a certainty that he shall be killed or drowned at that time, and in a certain way.

Much less, then, would any one venture to affirm

* Luke xviii. 31-34. John xii. 23-36.

that he will come to life again within three days and three nights after his death and burial. If the finite mind cannot read the future, it is still more evident that no created mind can reverse the laws of nature : and hence we may search in vain amid the annals of our race for any prediction analogous to that which Christ was known to have uttered, and that more than once, before he was crucified and slain.

Throughout the realms of heathendom there was no belief in a resurrection of the body. The idea, as advanced by Paul, was wholly new, even to the highly philosophic mind of Grecian antiquity ; and though some of the Israelites believed in a final resurrection, no one of their nation, from Moses down to Malachi, had ever predicted of another, much less of himself, that after being “ three days and three nights in the heart of the earth ” he would rise from the grave.

How could any self-conscious mortal say, what no mere man in solemn earnest would dare to affirm : “ I have power over my own life ; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”*

But though Christ laid claim to this power over his own life, and had said in the hearing of his disciples that he would rise again, yet this saying was “ hid from them,” and “ they understood it not.” So foreign was it to their wonted sentiments, so

* John x. 18.

contrary to their experience, that they could not entertain even the thought; or it was hid from them that they might at last be more thoroughly convinced of the fact itself: for, if they had not believed that Christ would rise from the dead on the third day after his burial, his resurrection would naturally recall his words to their minds; and thus the prediction would serve to strengthen their faith in the event.

Despair at times paralyzes all power of thought; and it may be that their disappointment was so great as to render them unable at the time to recall what Christ had said. Deeply pained as they must have been to witness the sufferings and ignominy to which their Master had been subjected; and knowing that they themselves were consequently exposed to the greater contumely and hate, it would have been contrary to the wonted operations of the mind under such circumstances had they then been able to rely on a prediction which, at the time it was uttered, could not have been apprehended by them in its true significancy.

But had this prediction been overheard by the enemies of Christ, it is not unreasonable to suppose that it would have made a very different impression on their minds. Not recognizing him as the promised Messiah, it could only have furnished them with additional proof of his impious assumption and sinister design, and consequently incited them to deadlier enmity.

Yet, if they were instrumental in putting Christ to death, it would have been but natural for them to conclude that the disciples of Christ might recollect his prediction ; and to shield themselves from the odium of having followed an impostor, might avail themselves of it, in some way, to impose on popular credulity.

Having witnessed the Crucifixion, and seen how Jesus whom they maligned and unjustly prosecuted had so meekly given up the ghost, it is by no means improbable that the vindictive passions by which they had been actuated, gave place to disturbing thoughts, and dark misgivings such as these:— We have pronounced him an impostor, and have caused him to be put to death as a blasphemer. What if we were blinded by bigotry, and inflamed by hatred in pronouncing sentence against him ? Ah, did we not in our madness even suborn witnesses ? We have cried to Heaven and said, “His blood be upon us, and our children !” What if, in accordance with his own words, he should rise from the dead ! But he is dead. We have seen him die. He cannot rise. No man of himself ever rose from the dead. But his disciples may secrete his body ; and should they contrive to make the people believe that he has risen, so deep is now their sympathy with the crucified Jesus whom they loved to follow, that it may react to our injury, and eventually to our overthrow.

Such a representation of their views and feelings

as consequent on the act which they had perpetrated, is far from being a gratuitous conjecture. They have put Christ to death; but the chief priests and pharisees are not content. If the form of Him whom they had so cruelly scourged and crucified has not risen before the eye of their conscience, the recollection of what he once said has rushed to their hearts, and they cannot rest.

The morning, therefore, after Christ was sepulchred, they sought an audience with Pilate, and said unto him: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first."*

Thus it appears that they were not ignorant of the prediction which Christ had uttered; that they dreaded the thought of its being even seemingly fulfilled; perceiving, as they did, that the popular impression of his having risen from the dead would tend to advance his cause far more than his teachings and works had already done; and hence their conviction that some precautions should be adopted, against any fraudulent design that might be entertained, and their determination that something should be done at once to preclude even the apparent accomplishment of a well-known prophecy.

* Matt. xxvii. 63, 64.

It would seem that Pilate himself coincided with them in this opinion ; for, though his reply was brief, it was prompt and pertinent : “ Ye have a watch : go your way ; make it as sure as you can. So they went and made the sepulchre sure ; sealing the stone and setting a watch.”*

This, however, was no more than should have been done, on the supposition that Christ had been justly put to death as a malefactor. It is sometimes important to guard the dead body of one who has been publicly executed according to the forms of law, lest the sight of it should cause a reaction in the public mind, or inflame the passions of those who had espoused his cause ; and it is possible that Pilate, being a ruler, might have been influenced by this consideration.

But not so, the priests and pharisees : they intend to confute Christ’s pretensions to the Messiahship of the Jews by disproving his own words. He had publicly said that he would “ rise again on the third day ;” and they will see to it that he does not : not even the sanctity of the Sabbath may interfere with the necessity of the case. “ The last error ” must, if possible, at whatever cost and trouble, whatever hazard to our ceremonial consistency, be precluded.

And now they have secured *the body* : it is closely encased, and strongly guarded ; and they are impatiently awaiting the dawn of the third day.

* Matt. xxii. 65, 66.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING BODY.

Lo, the predicted morn has gilded the eastern horizon ; and now the light of that day, ever after to be distinguished and honoured as the *first day* of the week, is thrown with resplendent lustre over the far-famed city of the Jews. There, on yonder eminence, can still be seen the cross where Jesus was crucified ; and there, in that garden, is the new-made sepulchre where his dead body was laid ; and there too is the “ great stone ” that was rolled against its mouth.

But where are the Roman soldiers who had been so urgently summoned, and authoritatively stationed there to guard with unwonted vigilance a poor lifeless body ? Where the chief priests and the pharisees who were to assemble this third day before the sepulchre in triumph over the body of their victim, still dead, and now mouldering, notwithstanding his prediction ? Are not all the disciples hiding their faces in shame and confusion ? Is not the whole nation now convinced that he who had said that he would rise on the third day, was not only a blasphemer, but a lying impostor ?

Most clearly, the priests and the pharisees intended to make a triumphant exhibition of Christ's dead body on the very day that he himself had specified as the day of his resurrection, or they would not have taken the pains they did to procure a watch and secure the sepulchre.

But they cannot produce the body: it is not there, where they knew it had been deposited, and where they had stationed their guard; and they are now forced to admit the fact.

Here the testimony of the Sanhedrim agrees with that of the disciples; and it is important to note this fact, and the more so, considering the effort that was made to guard the sepulchre.

Had it not been for the extraordinary precautions which the priests and the pharisees adopted, it might have been difficult to show that the body had not been clandestinely removed. But as the stone barrier at the mouth of the sepulchre had been sealed in their presence, and the watch appointed at their urgent solicitation, they have rendered themselves the most important witnesses to the fact that on the *third day the body was missing*; and they are bound to account for its disappearance in consistency with their own skeptical principles; or they, as is usually the case with the evil-minded, have outwitted themselves: nay, more; they have essentially advanced the cause which they had designed to crush.

If they cannot satisfactorily solve the mystery

of the missing body, the "last error" which the disciples will propagate may be a thousand times worse for them than "the first:" the "last error" may involve the subversion of their rule, the overthrow of their polity, the demolition of their temple: it may be the death-knell of their nation!

What now is their explanation? Do they say that Christ was not dead when he was buried? No; though modern infidels in extreme cases have resorted to this hypothesis, they not only believed that he was dead, they *knew* that he was; for they had seen him nailed to the cross; even seen him hanging there for hours until he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. They had stood among those who taunted, and reviled him, and challenged him to come down from the cross, if he was indeed the Son of God. They had seen him taken down from the cross; and they knew that the soldiers did not break his legs, because he was seen to be "dead already," and that when his side was pierced "forthwith came thereout blood and water."*

As they had been so maliciously intent on his execution, it is not probable they would have been satisfied unless they had the most palpable and conclusive evidence that he was dead; and when the body was missing, if it had occurred to them to deny that he was dead when entombed, they must have known that no one would have sided with them,

* John xx. 33, 34. Mark xv. 44, 45.

so long as great numbers had been witnesses of the fact that Christ was crucified until life was manifestly extinct.

Even on the supposition that he was not dead when he was laid in the sepulchre, and that while there he revived and arose, how was it possible for one who had hung in agony so long on the cross, and whose hands as well as side had been pierced, to remove the great stone which obstructed the entrance of the sepulchre, or to escape the vigilance of the guard?

It is certainly more difficult to believe that he could, than that he was dead when taken down from the cross; and he who would account for the fact that the body was missing, on the supposition that he had revived from the syncope consequent on his suspension from the cross, and had forced his way out of the sepulchre, and frightened away the soldiers who guarded its entrance, is disqualified by a prejudiced judgment for weighing probable evidence. He may vaunt himself on his philosophic or scientific culture; but had he been an eye-witness of the crucifixion; had he seen the body when it was wrapped in grave clothes, and seen where it was laid, and how the sepulchre was alike secured against either robbery or violence, and what kind of a guard had been stationed there, he would have perceived, as did the priests and pharisees themselves, that there was but one explanation left for all those who were not disposed or prepared to admit

that Christ had fulfilled his own prediction of himself.

Either that body was in some way clandestinely removed ; or Christ rose from the dead.

If it was removed, it must have been so by the agency either of the friends, or the enemies of Christ. One who might have been regardless of his living teachings, and indifferent to his end, could hardly have had a thought about the disposition of his dead body ; much less subjected himself to the trouble and risk of attempting its removal.

Yet it is quite as certain that they who opposed his mission, who sought his death, and exulted over his fate, would not, by making way with the body, aim to make it appear that they had indeed murdered the Son of God ; and that the disciples whom they had opposed and reviled were worthy of all credit and honour. Or, if they had maliciously aimed to revive the hopes of the disciples only to subject them at last to deeper mortification and disgrace, they would of course at some opportune moment have produced the body.

Thus, we are led necessarily to examine the disciples themselves ; nor would we fail to weigh well the charge which was brought against them. If that body was stolen it was stolen by them : no one else would have done it.

But no reasonable man ever acts without a motive ; and we can conceive of none which might have influenced them to take away the body : nor,

by so doing, could they have hoped to gain any credit to the story of Christ's resurrection, when, so long as it was in their possession, it could only have reminded them of the utter falsity of his own words.

Besides ; it was the time of the Passover, and about the period of the full of the moon. Jerusalem was thronged, and the sepulchre exposed to observation. Hence, had the disciples consented to take away the body, they must have been devoid of ordinary forethought to have hoped to succeed.

They must have known, moreover, that the sepulchre was strongly guarded by a band of Roman soldiers. Is it to be supposed, then, that they who had so lately fled from the band that had arrested their Master ; who, notwithstanding their protestations of inviolable attachment to him, were so terrified that they not only forsook him, but denied their discipleship, and sought to hide themselves ; that men so timid and irresolute as they must have been, should on a sudden re-unite, and concert measures to surprise the guard, force the sepulchre, and carry off the body of their crucified Master ?

Unless bereft of reason, they could hardly have engaged in an enterprise so fool-hardy as that in which success would have been as fatal to their cause, as failure had been to their lives !

No ; the disciples were few and friendless, dejected and powerless. The crucifixion had dashed

their hopes, and crushed them all to the dust. They had little, or rather, no expectation of the fulfilment of their Lord's prediction; all their thoughts were painfully absorbed in the apprehension of being themselves arrested, and put to death as the followers of the Nazarene. As soldiers are wont to flee, each one intent on his own safety, when their leader is slain, so had the disciples all dispersed when they saw the great stone rolled against the mouth of the sepulchre.

Let it be granted, however, that in their own private view they had some interest in taking away the body; and that, being as crafty as they were cowardly, they watched their opportunity, came to the sepulchre at an hour when no one happened to pass, and found all the guards asleep.

But the sepulchre was not a mound of soft and yielding earth: it had been hewn out in a rock,* and the stone with which the entrance was secured was unusually heavy, and carefully sealed;† and it is not more obvious that they must remove the stone before effecting their object, than that they could not have rolled it away without occasioning some little disturbance.

Moreover; though one might naturally suppose that persons in so great danger, as were the disciples, of being surprised by the guard, would have been as expeditious as possible, and taken up the body just as they found it; yet they did, and

* Matt. xxii. 60.

† Matt. xxii. 60, 66.

this, too, amid the darkness of the cave, what is not usual when a body is disinterred; what could have been of no advantage to them, and must needs have delayed them. Before they took the body, they divested it of its grave-clothes, and laid them in separate parcels around the sepulchre !*

It is not probable, however, that the guards slept. Their's was no familiar post of duty; nor were they ignorant of the purport of their charge. Stationed where they had never been before, and at the mouth of that sepulchre which but a few hours before had attracted the gaze of the multitude, it is more reasonable to conclude that they were animated by a thrilling curiosity, or excited by the fears of a superstitious prompting, rather than at all disposed to slumber.

That without an exception *all* should have fallen asleep when they were stationed there for so extraordinary a purpose, to see that that body was not stolen, lest it should be said that the crucified Jesus had risen from the dead, may be possible; but it is not credible: especially when it is considered that these guards were subjected to the severest discipline in the world. It was death for a Roman sentinel to sleep on his post. Yet these guards were not executed; nor were they deemed culpable even by the rulers, wofully chagrined and exasperated as they must have been by the failure of their plan for securing the body.

* John xx. 6, 7.

But as the Roman discipline was so severe, if the guards had fallen asleep, it is not likely that they would have acknowledged it: it is incredible that they should have voluntarily made such a confession; it is certain they did not.

Recovering from the death-like terror into which they were all thrown by the appearance of the angel, who rolled back the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre, and sat upon it, some of the guard “went into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all that was done; and when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept; and if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you:”* thus anticipating the very objection which would have occurred to the watch, well knowing, as they did, that they were amenable, not to them, but to Pilate. “So they took the money, and did as they were taught:” *i. e.* they were bribed to say what they knew to be false, were instigated by the priests and elders to propagate a shameless and ridiculous falsehood.

Such, however, is only a specimen of the subterfuges to which Infidelity is often constrained to resort. Absurdity may be more easily embraced than obnoxious truth admitted. Nonsense is the perfection of reason when moral demonstration conflicts with selfish interests.

* Matt. xxviii. 11-15.

It is curious that these priests and elders should have professed to rely, and aimed to persuade their countrymen to rely, on the testimony of a heathen guard, and that concerning what had taken place while they were avowedly asleep.

It was reasonable to suppose that they were at least over-anxious, and sorely pressed for evidence ; but it is not more preposterous than some of the hypotheses of infidel philosophy at the present day ; it is in entire harmony with the fact that some will now rely on the testimony of a Celsus, or a Julian, rather than on that of a Moses, or a Paul. It shows us what infidelity is, and ever must be—a sheer negation of truth, void of all foundation for its own theories, and deriving its conclusions from untenable premises.

It will be observed that the priests and elders did not themselves say that the disciples came by night and stole the body : this would have been to betray too much solicitude, and might have exposed them to some embarrassing questions. They told the soldiers to say this : “ *Say ye ;*” well knowing, as they did, that by often repeating what is false, men not unfrequently come to regard it as true ; that the people are always forward to adopt the first version of any occurrence ; and that if this story could but be rendered current among them, they would be only the more prejudiced against the disciples, and the less disposed to inquire into the facts in the case.

The common mind in all ages has been more easily swayed by dogmatism and effrontery than duly influenced by argument and reason ; and when a lie accords with one's predominant humour or favours selfish gratification, there will never be wanting enough to embrace it, though on reflection it might be seen to involve a combination of impossible circumstances, perhaps an egregious absurdity.

If it may not be admitted that the greater the lie the more readily will it be believed by the unthinking ; yet it is on this principle of human nature that the showman presumes, when, through the medium of his paid agents, he contrives to dupe the credulous, and augment his receipts. In this way, too, we may account for the fact that so many preposterous dogmas and lying wonders are regarded by not a few at the present day as Christian verities. Put into circulation by designing priests or others, they have been repeated, and even impressed in all their naked falsity on the susceptible mind of childhood, until they have come to be believed : just as the story of the theft was currently reported among the Jews so late as the date of John's Gospel.

In various relations, and for different ends, shrewd men often contrive to make others believe what they themselves know to be false ; and it is in this way that some get into offices of rule, and that others suddenly become rich.

That the Jewish rulers did not believe what they

instructed and bribed the soldiers to say, is almost self-evident. If they did, why were not the disciples at once arrested and examined? For such an act as was imputed to them involved a serious offence against the existent authorities. Why were they not compelled to give up the body? Or, in the event of their being unable to exculpate themselves from the charge, why were they not punished for their crime?

If the Jewish rulers could effect the condemnation and death of Christ, they surely have power enough to arraign his disciples for having broken the seal which had been authoritatively set on the door of the sepulchre, and thereby frustrated their own precautions to secure the body. If they have caused it to be rumoured that the body was stolen, they are bound to make it appear, if not from a regard to their own authority, at least for the sake of their own reputation; and if they do not, they stand before the eye of the whole community, self-convicted of falsehood and slander.

But so far from there being any proof that the disciples on this account were brought to justice, it is no where intimated that the rulers even attempted to substantiate the charge.

It cannot be said that they really had no interest in the final disposition of the body; and that, whatever interest there might have been in the event, it would soon subside, as all popular excitements usually do. This, be it considered, differed

from any occurrence that had ever agitated the mind of the people.

Amid all the scenes through which the Jewish people had passed, all the extraordinary events which had marked their history, there was no parallel to the crucifixion of Jesus; and amid all the various miracles which had been wrought by their prophets, nothing could have been so strange to them, and especially to the rulers who had been so intensely anxious, so particularly careful to seal and guard the sepulchre, as that the dead body of Jesus which they had seen laid there, and knew to be there when they set their watch, should now be missing.

If the people who had thronged the cross with mingled feelings of grief and indignation must now have gazed in awe and wonder at the vacant sepulchre, it is hardly possible that the priests and rulers of the Jews should have been unconcerned when they thought of the mysterious disappearance of that corpse. It was their dread of having it even whispered that Christ had risen according to his own declaration, that had led them to seal the great stone, and throw around it a strong guard of Roman soldiers; and if so be that the sepulchre has been invaded, and the body stolen, much more must this same dread of having it said that Christ is risen, for which, indeed, the missing body now affords a pretext, have impelled them to search out, and arrest the instigators of so audacious a scheme.

If any men were ever under the strongest possible inducements not to let a matter rest, but to ferret out and prosecute it to the utmost extent of the law, it was these same priests and rulers.

Let them lose no time in proving the story which they have originated, lest they should betray their true features to the gaze of the populace ; nay, lest the disciples themselves should gain a priceless advantage over them in the controversy which is soon to convulse society, and upheave the consolidated opinions of ages.

Already have the disciples heard of the theft which is imputed to them ; and they have not only contradicted the story, they have branded the originators of it with public infamy : for they have published to the world that the priests and elders actually bribed the soldiers to say what they knew to be false, and could not have known to be true when they were all asleep !

Strange as it may seem, though the report which they had so solicitously aimed to preclude, was soon after the disappearance of the body rife in the Jewish community ; yet all that the priests and rulers did with the disciples was to command them that they should not teach in the name of Jesus. They were afterwards repeatedly charged with disobedience to this command ; but nothing was ever alleged against them on the ground of the story which had become current among the Jews ; though the apostles had at last plainly declared in the

presence of the whole Jewish sanhedrim that Christ rose from the dead.

It is conclusive, therefore, that what the soldiers said was a sheer invention of the rulers, as malicious and shameless as it was absurd. It was designed to forestall popular opinion respecting the event, and to preclude all inquiry into facts ; and it is not at all improbable that if any one of those rulers had been privately questioned as to the story, he would have disclaimed all agency in it ; and it may be expressed his profound surprise that the soldiers could say so. Unprincipled rulers, whether in the church or the state, often know but too well how to compass sinister ends without disclosing their own hand.

Having originated the story, these priests and elders would have left it with the soldiers without a word, for or against it, to work its mischievous way into wide-spread circulation ; and they might not have cared had there been only in private some diversity of opinion.

But to hear it whispered that He whom they had executed as an impostor and a blasphemer had risen from the dead ; and at last, to hear it proclaimed that they had “killed the Prince of life whom God hath raised from the dead,” no wonder they were exasperated as well as troubled. It was to be reminded of their suborned witnesses, and of the price of blood which they had themselves paid, and of their own horrid imprecations upon them-

selves and their children ! “Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name ? And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring *this man’s blood upon us !*”*

Wretched men ! who can believe that they would not have exposed the theft, and overwhelmed the apostles with shame and confusion of face, had it only been in their power ?

It may be thought that if they did not accredit their own explanation of the missing body, they would have embraced the apostles’ doctrine : this by no means follows. One may not be able to make out his case, and yet be unprepared to espouse the opposite cause, be rather only the more prejudiced against the right in consequence of his own failure. If actuated by motives which will not endure scrutiny, or swayed by selfish interests, he will be exasperated rather than convinced by any array of fact and argument : such is oftentimes the unreasonableness and the obstinacy of our nature.

With these rulers of the Jews, it had long been, and was then, and perhaps, more than ever, a struggle for pre-eminence and rule. As hypocritical and unscrupulous as they were bigoted, and now fearing the loss of their authority over the people, they cannot hear, much less examine, a case which, if it proves anything, proves too much for those who were accessory to the recent tragedy.

* Acts v. 2.

To retract the error, or to acknowledge the wrong, is always too hard for those who love the ways and wages of iniquity more than truth and justice ; and above all, for men who at every step of their elevation to power and rule have violated some principle of truth and right, and thus hardened their hearts.

But if men could put Christ to death, notwithstanding the astonishing and gracious miracles which they knew he had wrought, and some of which, in all probability, they had themselves seen, it is evident that they were not in a suitable frame of mind to consider the proofs of his having risen from the dead.

If any could reject Christ even when they actually saw him raise Lazarus from the grave, it is morally certain that they would not be forward to conclude that he himself had risen from the dead because his body was not to be found ; and much more that they would not believe that he had risen, simply on the testimony of his disciples, against whom they must have been as prejudiced and embittered as they had been against Christ himself.

The same principle which led them to reject Christ's miracles while he was alive, would necessarily incline them to blind their eyes to all the evidences of his mission, after he was seen to be dead.

Hating his doctrines, how could they be convinced by his works ? Having thirsted for his

blood, how could they calmly entertain the thought that he had come to life again ?

With such views and feelings, all darkened by hate, and inflamed by bigotry, they have nothing to hope, but everything to fear, if so be that Christ has risen from the dead. And if any among them should yet be convinced, and brought to believe in Christ, it will be by a *miracle of mercy*, such as He who prayed for his murderers alone knows how to invoke ; and such as One must himself have risen from the dead, to be able to perform.

CHAPTER III.

PRESUMPTIVE PROOFS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

IF, then, notwithstanding the precautions which had been instituted against either the forcible or clandestine removal of the body, it was not to be found in the sepulchre on the morning of the third day after the crucifixion; if neither the enemies nor the friends of Jesus either would or could have taken it away; if the priests and elders could not have accredited the story they had put into circulation, and there were ample reasons of a moral nature why they should have been most reluctant to inquire into the facts in the case, it is to be presumed that the prediction, which Christ had been known to utter, was literally fulfilled.

There is no intrinsic absurdity in the supposition; nor was such an event impossible. He who created man has certainly the power to restore a dead man to life; and if God sent Christ into the world, he could as easily have raised him from the dead, and might have done so, had it been necessary to any wise end.

Viewing Christ as a mere man, it is possible that he might have been endowed with prescience; and

possible, considering the end of his mission, that he might have been raised from the dead to attest the truth of all that he had been commissioned to promulge.

But if he was indeed the *God-man*, it was just as possible for him to reanimate the body which was laid in the sepulchre of Joseph, and in that same body to resume his humanity, as it was for him, before his crucifixion, by virtue of the Divinity veiled in his form, to remand the soul, and revivify the body of a man who had been dead four days; nor is it more difficult in the one case than in the other, but alike impossible, for us to conceive how this might have been done.

Moreover; it is not improbable that a person who had been born of an immaculate conception, and three times declared, by an audible voice from heaven, to be the Son of God; who had never uttered what was not true, never spoken a word that he was constrained to recall or regret, never performed a work that did not at once attest his superiority over all preceding prophets sent of God, and his power over the laws of the material creation; who foresaw his own death, and might in his hour of trial have summoned legions of angels to his rescue: it is not improbable that such a person would verify his own prediction, and rise victorious over the assaults of death and hell.

Since the world began, no man had of himself risen from the grave; but no one before this same

Jesus had ever been seen to unite in himself the attributes of a God with the properties of a man ; and hence, had he on the third day after his crucifixion risen from the dead, the act itself would have been in perfect harmony with the most extraordinary of all lives, a life of miracles.

In itself the act could hardly have been more wonderful than that, by a touch, or by a word, he should have opened the eyes of men who had been born blind, cured multitudes of the most desperate diseases to which humanity is subject, fed five thousand people by multiplying a few loaves of bread, stilled the tempest, walked on the sea, cast out devils, raised the dead.

And has *He* gone down to an undistinguishable grave, he, who while he lived knew no sin, and who, in the hour of his death, suffered mental agony such as no man had ever borne ? Was there a peculiarity in his death even to the mind of heathendom ? And is there no significancy in his burial ? Can it be that the grave has closed for ever over him to whom all the prophets had borne witness ; and to whom also the expectation of the world had been so long directed, whose birth had been announced by angels, whose Godlike acts had been confessed by devils, at whose command all nature bowed as in the presence of her God, and with whose expiring cry nature herself sympathized ?

If not one of his various miracles had failed of its designed end, shall the malice of his enemies

defeat his well known prediction? If none of his miracles were, as was the case with all heathen prodigies, performed for trifling ends, but all involved the most important truths, and alike tended to subserve the development of one vast scheme of human redemption, then was the way prepared, and a necessity laid, for a yet greater miracle than he had ever wrought, to wit; the *verification of his own plighted word that he would rise from the dead.*

So it appears to us, as we reflect on the tenor of his history; and so it should appear to any one, who, after the lapse of ages, would be prepared to examine, or can be competent to weigh with precision and candour, the facts in the case.

He must be strangely obtuse who can be imposed on by the modern infidel's position that the very desire of immortality disqualifies one from exercising an impartial judgment in relation to Christ's history: a position which, if it be not too fallacious to be formally exposed, must be seen to operate with more logical force against *his* qualifications for examining a matter which clashes with his selfish interests, and may foreshadow his doom.

To be indifferent in a matter of so great moment; to divest oneself of all concern as to the result, if indeed that were possible, is to neglect all inquiry; to have one's mind pre-occupied with earth-born interests, to surrender one's being to casual impressions and fortuitous developments. Or, to bring to such an inquiry a mind swayed by evil passions

and darkened by prejudice, is to narrow one's range of thought ; to overlook what is logical in reasoning, and sound in testimony, and see only what is objectionable to lust and inexplicable to ignorance.

In all inquiries of a moral nature there must be a love of truth, and a desire to ascertain the truth, whatever its relations and demands ; and in reference to the miraculous fact in question, a fact which cannot be admitted without admitting the doctrines which grow out of it, doctrines confessedly at variance with the mind and will of the flesh, it is not to be supposed that an inquirer is favourably biased in his examination of the fact, when he does but avail himself of all the lights within his reach, and proceeds with a beating heart and docile mind to the place where they sepulchred the body of the Crucified !

We do not prejudge a case when we but take into consideration what is essential to a right judgment. We are not disqualified ourselves from judging of a fact, when we have but ascertained whether there was any probability of such an act.

A presumptive argument, though by no means conclusive, is always desirable ; in some instances, it is indispensable ; and in this, the want of it, were fatal to belief in the alleged fact.

But as, in canvassing the probability of a revelation from God, we must take into consideration his perfections as discerned through his works, and man's wants as developed in consciousness, so is it

necessary in considering the question whether Christ rose from the dead, to have some knowledge of his character and doings; of his life, and of his death: yea, also, and of what man is by nature, and of what man needs, but what by nature he can never reach.

It was no question of trivial or transient interest *how* that sealed and guarded sepulchre was rifled of death's treasure! The hopes and fears of men to the latest time are all involved in its solution: not simply because the body that was so securely laid there can no where be found, but because the world had never before seen such a man: *Jesus of Nazareth* who was crucified, dead and entombed!

Had he not been The Man among men, as he is represented to have been by his contemporaries, this story of his resurrection might be philosophically classed with the myths and fables of heathen mythology. Viewed apart from the tenor of his teachings, the significance of his works, and the sinless perfection of his character, his prediction was presumptuous; and separate from the nature and design of his death, his resurrection was uncalled for, and could have been of no more significance to us, no more worthy of credence, than the reported resurrection of any other man would have been.

Hence, in their assaults on Christianity, men usually begin by questioning the divinity of Christ: then, they doubt his atonement; and afterwards

pervert his sayings, and explain away his doings, until at last they are prepared to look upon him as but a man, having no higher relation to the age in which he lived than they themselves bear to this.

As such, however, there was no more reason for his being raised from the dead than in the case of any preceding prophet; and there was no purpose to be answered by his resurrection that might not have been accomplished by any of his previous works: for, if such a miracle as he performed at the grave of Lazarus was not sufficient to attest the truth of his doctrines, his rising from his own grave would carry no more conviction to those who had not then believed.

If he rose, therefore, it must have been *for a higher purpose* than could have been answered by either the acts of his life, or the passive sufferings of his death: to wit, that he might be “declared to be the Son of God with power,” and might proclaim to the heirs of a fallen humanity the joyful tidings of expiated sin through faith in that blood that was shed upon the cross.

As there was no necessity for his incarnation unless Christ came to do what no mere man could have been rendered competent to do; so, if he was not “delivered for our offences,” all the ends of his mission could have been answered without his resurrection.

We should have had the same true sayings of God, the same code of morals, the same parabolic

representations, the same prophetic intimations of future judgment, the same example of patience and resignation, of purity and love, the same lesson of self-sacrifice; and in the miracles which he wrought, the same assurance that God could raise us up at the last day: in a word the same revelation of the Fatherhood of God, and of the responsibility and immortality of the soul, but not the same evidence that he himself was “the Son of God,” and much less “the Lamb of God.”

He might still have been regarded, and justly so, as the greatest of prophets—the most heroic of martyrs; and his memory been still cherished in the hearts of the good; but who could have believed that he died a sacrifice for sin? Who could have looked for deliverance from the curse of the law, if he who offered up his life on Calvary had continued under the power of death, *himself* the conquered instead of the conqueror? Where would have been the evidence that God had accepted his sacrifice, or that we, through him, could obtain eternal life? Must not the Jew have been confirmed in his unbelief; and his disciples all been scattered, never again to be gathered in faith and hope around their crucified Master? Most conclusively reasoned the apostle when he said, “If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain; and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins.”*

The logical connection which subsists between

* 1 Cor. xv. 14.

the mysterious constitution of his person, and the end of his resurrection is as obvious to us as it was to the Jewish rulers, that if he should indeed rise from the grave they would stand convicted of having murdered the Son of God; and hence the miracle of his resurrection has been disputed by those who have been unwilling to recognize in his wondrous pathway through Judea, the foot-prints of a God in human form; while they who admit the fact of his resurrection, and yet deny his Incarnate Divinity, act inconsistently with their own principle that he was sent into the world merely to announce a clearer revelation of the mind and will of God; inconsistently, also, with the apostles' adoring views of Christ, on whose testimony to the fact itself they must of course rely, if they believe that he was raised from the dead.

But whatever presumptive arguments in favour of his having risen from the sepulchre on the day which he had specified, may be now gathered from pondering the records of his history in the light of ancient prophecy, and with the aid of inspired commentators, no such advantage had the disciples at the time of his death. Not that none such existed; not that Christ had not duly instructed them, and even told them what was before *them* as well as himself; not that they had failed to see in him all the radiant evidences of the Messiah of their prophecies; but that in accordance with the notions of their age they had mistaken the nature

of his kingdom; and, owing to their consternation and distress when Christ was so maltreated, that they could not calmly reflect on the import of his words.

Men, thrown as they were, and that suddenly, into the midst of a frantic rabble, seeing their blessed Master stretched on the cross, and knowing not how soon they themselves might be arrested and arraigned before the same unjust tribunal, could not have been cheered even by their own recollections of Christ's words which the rulers had employed to justify themselves in putting him to death.

Even at the present day, men, through fear of personal difficulties, often lose sight of principles, and under the influence of preconceived views, misinterpret the plainest words of Scripture.

Though we may understand the import of Christ's prediction, it is not strange that the disciples did not. Though it is essential that we should understand who it was that uttered such a prediction, that we may be competent to judge whether its fulfilment was at all probable, yet as the disciples understood it not, it is certain that they could not have ascribed to Christ so extraordinary a prediction, had he not uttered it, or they would not have recorded their own stupidity and despondence: and it is certain that they could not have originated an unfounded report of his having risen, when, if they did not understand his prediction, they could

not have been expecting him to rise; much less would they have told the world that, though they, his professed followers, had lost sight of their Master's words, his enemies remembered them, while the fact that some of their rulers guarded the sepulchre because they thought that the disciples might remember and take advantage of this prediction, shows clearly that it was not a shrewd afterthought of the disciples to secure credence to the report that Christ had risen.

But if a person who had so lived and so died as Christ had done, should rise from the grave, it may reasonably be supposed that, while the event itself would be attended with no ordinary phenomena, he himself would demonstrate his identity in ways, and by means, which could leave no doubt in the minds of his disciples as to the fact itself: that he would come to them as he had been wont, accost them in familiar tones, hush their fears, animate their courage, clear up their darkened apprehensions, enlighten them in all things pertaining to his kingdom, and qualify them to carry on the work which he had consecrated by his blood, and attested by his resurrection.

But whatever may have been his character, and his works, we need something more than mere presumptions before we can believe that he rose from the dead: nothing less than facts which cannot be disproved; and arguments which will admit of not even a plausible refutation.

We shall not, we cannot believe it: it is too marvellous, as indeed everything about this same Jesus is, to be accredited, unless attested by evidence which cannot be mistaken; unless accompanied by signs which cannot be logically explained on any ground save that of the miraculous fact itself; which must be unanswerably conclusive as to the fact, unless there is nothing in history, no one worthy of trust, and no man who can confide either in his neighbour's testimony, or in his own senses.

CHAPTER IV.

POSITIVE EVIDENCE.

OUR blessed Lord did not come forth from the sepulchre in the presence of an assembled multitude. Had it been so stated, it would not have been in unison with that studious avoidance of unnecessary publicity which had marked his whole life; while it would have betrayed in the narrators of the event a leaning to stage effect; and thus, instead of being invested with a mysterious sublimity—as it now is, the event would have been brought down to the level of some earth-born marvel, such as the heathen were fond of representing, or as ghostly jugglery has been known to contrive.

But when he rose from the dead, no human eye saw him, not even the soldiers who had been stationed before the sepulchre to watch the remains of that solitary death-sleeper within its portals: for when they felt the earth quake, and saw the angel, regardless alike of them and of the seal, instantly remove the great stone barrier, and sit thereon, they “became as dead men.”*

Their flight, therefore, was consequent on their fright; and hence, though they told the rulers of

* Matthew xxvii. 4.

what had happened, yet as they had seen no one but the angel, and knew not what had become of the body, they were the more easily induced to adopt the explanation, and gratify the wishes of those whom they knew might at any moment arrest them for having deserted their post.

But the women who lingered so late at the sepulchre, and who had continued in their work of preparing to embalm the body until the shades of the Sabbath eve began to gather around them, could have had no knowledge of the appointment of a guard, or of the sealing of the great stone.

This was the work of the priests and rulers, done, too, on the very day which they had so loudly professed to reverence; but the women, we are told, “rested according to the commandment:”^{*} and hence, as the Marys, together with Salome, whom they either met or called to go with them at the earliest dawn of the third day, were hastening to the sepulchre, and probably that they might embalm the body before any others could reach that spot to perform the last office of bereaved affection, their only apprehension was that they might not be able to remove the stone which, according to their recollection, “was very great;” for they had seen it placed there, and it was the last object on which their eye had rested: thus “saying among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?”[†]

^{*} Luke xxiii. 56.

[†] Mark xvi. 3.

Imagine their surprise and fear, when, as they drew nigh the sepulchre, “at the rising of the sun,” they perceived “that the stone was already rolled away!”*

It was but natural for one of Mary Magdalene’s temperament to conclude that the body was stolen; and it is not improbable that she turned back and hastened to tell Peter and “that other disciple” what had happened: that “they had taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre.”†

But the other Mary and Salome, we may suppose, went on, and finding no obstruction at the entrance, were just entering the sepulchre, when they were affrighted by the sight of “a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment:”‡ probably the same angel that had sat on the great stone, and frightened away the keepers, who, anticipating the object of their visit, said unto them, “Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified: he is not here, for he is risen, as he said. But go your way; tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.”§

Amazed and trembling “they went out quickly and fled from the sepulchre;” too agitated by conflicting emotions “to say anything to any man.”||

Joanna, who might have come in the moment after they left, anticipated no difficulty in removing

* Mark xvi. 2-3.

† John xx. 2.

‡ Mark xvi. 5-6.

§ Matt. xxviii. 5-6.

|| Mark xvi. 8.

the stone, as she was accompanied by other women ; and might have expected, according to an agreement made between them on the eve of the Sabbath, to meet there both Salome and the Marys. She, however, saw that the stone was rolled away, and that the body was not in the sepulchre. But neither she nor either of her companions saw the angel where he was seen by those who had preceded them.

Yet while they were wrapped in amazement, "Behold two men stood by them in shining garments ; and as they were afraid, and bowed their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead ? He is not here, but is risen : remember how he spake unto you while he was yet in Galilee ; saying, The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they, it appears, remembered his word, and retiring from the sepulchre communicated these things to the disciples.*

No sooner had they gone, than John came, followed by Peter whom he had "outrun," so greatly had their apprehensions been excited by what Mary had told them.

But though John stooped down, and "looking in saw the linen clothes, yet went he not in" until Peter had gone in, and had seen "the linen clothes and the napkin that was about his head, not lying

* Luke xxiii. 56 ; xxiv. 1-9.

with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.”*

There was then no angel visible, and no Divine communication heard; and though Peter “wondered in himself at that which was come to pass,”† it seems that neither he nor the other apostles at that time knew the import of the Scripture that Christ must rise from the dead.‡

But with an interest how unutterable must “that other disciple” have awaited the result of Peter’s examination of the sepulchre; and with what sentiments of revived confidence in his blessed Lord’s prediction, must he afterwards have gone himself into the sepulchre, for when he went in, *he saw and believed*.

Thus he was the first that ever believed in a risen but unseen Saviour: the prototype of evangelical faith, *faith in Him* “whom though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.”

Such a circumstance could hardly have been accidental; nor would it have occurred to a forger of the visits to the sepulchre to represent John as the first to believe; and this too before the women, who, though they had not seen Jesus, had been expressly told by an angel that Christ was risen.

But it was *John* that believed when he saw in the careful disposition of the grave-clothes in which Jesus had been shrouded sufficient proof to his

* John xx. 3-7.

† Luke xxiv. 12.

‡ John xx. 8, 9.

mind that the body had not been stolen or taken away: John, "that other disciple," who at the "last supper" had leaned on Jesus' bosom; to whose care Jesus, while hanging on the cross, had committed his weeping mother; who had taken her to his own home, that she might not witness her son's expiring agonies; and if either of the disciples on recovering from the shock of the crucifixion should have been the first to recollect what Christ had said, "After three days I will rise again," surely it was he, the loved and loving disciple!

But there is a special message yet to be delivered to Peter, who was particularly named in the communication which the angel made to Mary and Salome; and probably because it was this disciple who had so flagrantly denied his Master.

Neither of these disciples, however, lingered at the sepulchre: "they went away again into their own home."*

And now Mary, who had previously informed both John and Peter of what had happened, and who of course had not been able to equal their speed, reaches the sepulchre; and she "stands without at the sepulchre, weeping." If the body has been taken away, she will sift the matter for herself, and water the place where he had lain with her tears.

But lo! as "she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, she saw two angels in white, sitting

* John xx. 10.

the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." They asked her, Why she wept? "Because," said she, "they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

Her grief was too deep to admit of her being frightened as the other women had been when they saw and heard "the angel;" but like one absorbed in the object of her search, she turned away to look elsewhere; and seeing a person whom she supposed to be the gardener, for the sepulchre was in a garden, "She said unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away."

The keeper of the garden, she thought, must needs know something about the removal of the body; and in this state of mind, it is not surprising that she should not have recognized in him who stood before her *the risen Jesus!*

But when Jesus spoke again, and simply called her by name, it was as if a blaze of light had burst upon her vision, and a stream of joy overflowed her heart.

"*Rabboni!*" was all she could utter. But that exclamation more truly than words could have expressed it, betokened her most unexpected recognition of him whose body she would have embalmed: her instantaneous faith, her holy love, and pure devotion; and with what glowing sentiments of hope revived she would have detailed to him her

settled conviction that her eye and ear had not deceived her, may be inferred from his reply: "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father.*

* John xx. 17. It is unnecessary in this connection to advert to any of the numerous explanations which have been suggested by different biblical critics. Even scholarly minds must differ in relation to this passage if they proceed on the supposition that there is some mystical meaning in Christ's words on the occasion, or that his resurrection body was not sensible to touch: or that it is necessary to harmonize their explanations with some theological preconception. But whether the Greek text in its grammatical construction should be strictly adhered to; or whether it will admit of a tropical interpretation in consistency with reason, comes not now within our province to inquire. In weighing the proofs of the resurrection, it is sufficient to view the text simply in its obvious connections; and especially, if it can be made to appear that it does not conflict with the record of Christ's interviews with any other of his disciples, and much less with his instructions to them immediately previous to his death.

It was but natural for one who had so bitterly mourned his cruel death, and so anxiously awaited the dawn of the third day after his burial to embalm the body, to be transported with wonder and delight on so unexpectedly meeting Jesus in the garden: just as it was natural for the other Mary and Salome, who, though they ran from the sepulchre with a design to tell the disciples what they had seen and heard, as the angel had ordered them, to be so agitated in consequence of the fright into which they had been thrown as to neglect to deliver the message to some (probably John and Peter*) whom they saw on their way; and when Jesus met them in the way,—to cast themselves at his feet in speechless awe of his resurrection-presence! But as Jesus said to them "be not afraid," so, in adaptation to Mary's state of mind—absorbed as she was in the one blessed thought of having found her buried and lost Rabboni, and yet believing not for joy,—he said unto her, *Μη μου ἅπτον*, "Touch me not:" there will be other opportunities of seeing me, and testing the fact of my resurrection; for I go not yet to the Father: lose no time then; but go, and tell my brethren that I am shortly to ascend unto my Father and your Father—to my God, and your God.

* Mark xvi. 6, 7, 9: John xx. 4.

Thus, though John was the first to believe in the risen Jesus, Mary Magdalene was the first to whom

In appearing to the other Mary and Salome, his object seems to have been to relieve their minds of all fear so as to prevent their forgetting or neglecting to carry their important message from the angel to the disciples; and to this end he adopted the most suitable means: graciously saluting them; calming their fears; dispelling their doubts; permitting them to "hold him by the feet," and to worship him; and in confirmation of what the angel had said to them, bidding them to go and tell his disciples from him that they should see him in Galilee. So to convince a disciple who, in the extremity of his grief, had abandoned his mind to the most hopeless skepticism, he showed him his hands and his side; and said to him: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless but believing." But his object in so doing was to make him a faithful and self-sacrificing witness of the resurrection—an *Apostle*.

Thus, if we overlook not his object in making himself known to Mary, there will be no difficulty, we apprehend, in ascertaining the drift of this passage: it was not only to disabuse her mind of the erroneous impression that his death, as in the case of any mere man, was his final departure from the world; but that through her—as the bearer of his message to the disciples, they might be in some degree prepared to meet him:—the peculiar terms in which his message was couched being so well adapted to preclude the idea that Mary had seen the spirit of Jesus, instead of Jesus in person, and consequently to recall to their minds the promise which he had made to them on the eve of his betrayal—of coming to them again before he should finally retire from their sight. "A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me because I go to the Father." (John xvi. 16.) "I am come forth from the Father, and come into the world; and again I leave the world, and go to the Father." (John xvi. 28.) Thus teaching them that his resurrection was but the harbinger of his ascension; his glorification no less essential to his nature and office than his resurrection; and that on his return to his Father, all the gracious promises which he had made to them before his passion would be fulfilled. See John xiv. Indeed, it is from the tenor of this message to the disciples that, independently of the record, we might argue the

the risen Jesus *appeared*. Hers is the first name that he pronounced after his resurrection; and she is the first to behold the risen Jesus; for in ready and joyous obedience to his command, she forthwith departed from the sepulchre, and “told the disciples that she had *seen the Lord*, and that he had spoken these things unto her.”*

The next witnesses of the fact were probably the “other Mary,” and Salome whom Jesus might have met in some retired spot, where, it is supposable, they had halted for a moment to recover from the effects of their speechless fright; and who said unto them, “All hail! Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.”†

The next in order is Peter. In consequence of what Joanna had related, and more particularly of what Salome and the Marys had said, that the Lord had appeared to them, he ran again to the sepulchre.‡

But though the grave-clothes were still lying there as he had seen them before, he himself was accosted by no angel, nor did he see Jesus. Thus his second visit to the sepulchre was attended with no more relief of mind than the first: he goes away

probability of his having appeared first to Mary; and though some of our contemporaries seem to adopt Dr. Robinson's harmony, we see no good reason for supposing that Christ's appearance to the other Mary and Salome was prior to his appearance to Mary at the garden.

* John xx. 11-18. † Matt. xxviii. 9-10. ‡ Luke xxiv. 12.

with the same throbbing heart—the same perplexed and anguished thoughts.

Yet shortly after this, while he was all alone, and pondering more deeply what had come to pass, he was favoured by a visit from the risen Jesus; and thus became the first apostolic eye-witness to the fact of Christ's resurrection.*

It is certain, according to the apostle Paul, that he was seen by Cephas before any of the other apostles saw him; and to this end it was that Christ had previously said to him: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I build my church," to this end also, that the angel had directed the women to tell *him* in particular that Christ had risen, and that he was afterwards the first to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.

Peter's second visit to the sepulchre, though it is still early, was probably the last that was made by any of the disciples. There is now no further occasion for going there. The body is no longer where it was laid; and strange reports are in circulation: that angels have spoken to the women; that the Marys and Salome have seen the Lord, and that he has at last appeared to Peter.

Those two disciples who are on their way home to Emmaus have heard some of the reports; and while they are in great perplexity of mind, Jesus joins them, and makes himself known to them in a most convincing manner, having "expounded unto

* Luke xxiv. 34; 1 Cor. xv. 5.

them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself," and as he sat at meat with them, having taken bread, and blessed it, and broken it, and given it to them, so that "their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight."*

In the meantime, the other disciples, though they have no doubt that the sepulchre is empty, are all, with the single exception of John, most painfully embarrassed in their judgments. They have received the angelic messages as sent to them by the women. Mary Magdalene has told them that she has actually seen Jesus, and with beaming eyes of joy has delivered his express message to them: her statement is confirmed by that of the other Mary and Salome; but all is to them "as idle tales." The additional testimony of Peter, who has now come in, does not convince them: even that of "the two disciples" who returned forthwith from Emmaus to Jerusalem to tell them, "how Jesus was known to them in the breaking of bread" does not dispel their doubts.†

At last, and probably on the eve of the same eventful day, while they were earnestly discussing the matter with closed doors, Jesus *himself* appeared in the midst of them.

But so terrified were they by his unexpected and

* Luke xxiv. 13-32. See "Responses from the Sacred Oracles," p. 367.

† Mark xvi. 9-13.

inexplicable appearance to them that they could not be assured that he was not a spirit until he told them to behold him steadfastly, to see and to feel both his hands, and his feet, still bearing the marks of the nails which had pierced them; and to confirm their faith, not only did he eat before them, but “he opened the Scriptures to them” as he had before done to “the two disciples;” and finally *breathed* upon them: thus at once convincing them of his living personal identity, and conferring upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost.

But Thomas was not then with the disciples, and it is in vain that they afterwards attempt to convince him that Jesus is risen. They can prove that he has already been seen *five times*; but Thomas will not believe unless he can see the prints of the nails, and put his fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into the wounded side of Him whom he knew to have been but lately crucified and slain.*

It was therefore for the very purpose of convincing this disciple, that Jesus, on the succeeding first day of the week, appeared to the Eleven; and giving to Thomas, whom at first he upbraided for his unbelief, the proofs which he had demanded, extorted from him an involuntary tribute to his own Divinity: “*My Lord, and my God!*”†

* John xx. 24-25. See also, “Religion Teaching by Example,” p. 371.

† John xx. 26-28.

His next appearance was at a distance of about eighty miles from Jerusalem, in Galilee, whither a number of the disciples had gone at the close of the feast, and where in accordance with the promises which had been made to them both before and after the resurrection, they might have expected to see the Lord.

He was standing on the shore the morning after "Simon Peter, and Thomas, and Nathanael, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples" had been all the previous night unsuccessfully fishing; and as they were only two hundred cubits from the land, they could see him, and hear him speak.*

At his suggestion, they cast their net on the right side of the ship, and soon enclosed a multitude of fishes, so that they were not able to draw it; and yet it did not occur to them that it was Jesus, so unexpected was the time and manner of his appearance, until John whispered to Peter,—
"It is the Lord!"

How characteristic of this disciple is it that as soon as he understood who it was, he "girt his fisher's coat unto him, and cast himself into the sea:" too impulsive to wait for the ship which could make but little headway while the disciples were "dragging the net with fishes."

On reaching the land, they saw "a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon and bread;" and at Christ's

* John xxi. 1-8; ib. 9-11.

bidding, Peter by himself drew the net to land ; nor was the net broken, though it “was full of great fishes, an hundred, and fifty, and three.”

Jesus then invited them to “come and dine” with him ; and though they knew that it must be Jesus, that no one but he could have wrought the miracle ; yet none of them could venture to ask him, *Who art thou ?* so overawed were they !—as indeed it was but natural they should have been, considering the miraculous draft of fishes which they had witnessed, and finding themselves on the lonely shore of Tiberias thus unexpectedly brought into the presence of him whom they had seen so recently crucified on Calvary, and consigned in death to the rock-ribbed sepulchre.

This was the *third time* that Jesus made himself known to the body of the apostles ; and what a favourable opportunity was that, as on the quiet shore of that beautiful lake they partook with him of the meal which he had supernaturally provided, to give to them the instructions which they needed, and to prepare them for the work to which he had called them.

It was there that Jesus addressed himself in so striking and touching a manner to the disciple who had denied him ; there, that his allusion to the beloved disciple gave occasion for the saying among the brethren that “that disciple should not die ;” * and there, that on parting with them, he

* John xxi. 23.

probably gave notice, and told them to communicate the intelligence to others that, agreeably to his promise, he would meet them on the mountain in Galilee.*

It was in Galilee that he had spent the most of his days : there it was too, that his divine utterances had been so often heard : there the greater proportion of his followers resided ; and this might have been the reason for selecting a mountain in Galilee as the most convenient place for a numerous meeting. And thither in due time the brethren repaired, in all “about five hundred,” to whom he showed himself openly, and gave “infallible signs” of his resurrection.

They are called “brethren,” because they were “chosen witnesses ;” and Paul says, when writing his first epistle to the Corinthians, that though some of them had died, the greater part of these witnesses were then alive.†

He also states, and as if it had been a fact well known, that after this meeting in Galilee Jesus appeared to the apostle James.‡ But this is a point of subordinate moment, especially as the Evangelists have recorded no conversation between the risen Jesus and this apostle.

His last appearance was “to all the apostles” then living, Judas having “gone to his own place :” his last personal interview with any of

* Matt. xxviii. 16-17. † 1 Cor. xv. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 7.

the disciples was with "the eleven,"* and with none but those who were soon to commence a work which should not cease until he who is to be taken up into heaven, shall so come in like manner as they are soon to see him go into heaven.

Those who lived in Galilee have repaired again to Jerusalem to be present at "the feast of weeks,"—the Pentecost; and it is, we may suppose, the fortieth day since his resurrection, that Jesus now for the last time assembles those whom he had chosen to be his apostles.

The place of meeting might have been, and probably was, where Jesus had for the last time partaken of the Passover with his disciples: where he had also broken bread for them to eat, and handed the cup for them to drink of in commemoration of his dying love; where they had so recently assembled through fear of their Jewish enemies; and where they ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead both on the evening of the day of his resurrection, and on the evening of the succeeding first day of the week.

Yes; there and then it was that he dispelled all lingering doubts from their minds, and confirmed their faith, and cheered their hearts, and animated their hopes, speaking to them more fully than he

* The usual appellation of the Apostles was that of the *twelve*: thus Paul speaks in 1 Cor. xv. 5. But in Matt. xxviii. 16, Mark xvi. 14, and Luke xxiv. 33, they are referred to as the *eleven*. On one occasion (John xx. 24,) there might have been but *ten* of the apostles present.

had ever done “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

There and then it was that he commissioned them to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature;” to “baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;” and to teach them “to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them:” solemnly promising that he would “be with them alway even to the end of the world.”*

That all things might be brought to their remembrance, whatsoever he had spoken, and that they might be prepared to execute their high commission, then it was, moreover, that he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait there, even there where he had been crucified, and in the midst of those who had crucified him, to wait for the promise of the Father: assuring them that in the course of a few days after his departure they would “be baptized with the Holy Ghost.”†

And now the closing scene approaches. How powerfully do local associations affect our hearts! As if to recall to their remembrance the incidents of his life, and connect his history both before and since his death in indissoluble union, that they might ever think of him, and believe in him as their once crucified but now risen and ascended Lord,

* Mark xvi. 15. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. † Luke xxiv. 49.

“he led them out as far as Bethany,”* and “the mount called Olivet.”

What must have been their emotions while he conversed with them by the wayside as he had been wont, and when they came to the spot where in times past they had so often hung upon his lips, and seen his works, and breathed the atmosphere of his purity, and felt the fervour of his prayers, it may not be impossible to imagine; but who can conceive or even appreciate the spirit which ever filled, and now overflows the bosom of the risen Jesus?

Grievously wronged as he had been, and most cruelly put to death, yet no vindictive sentiment escapes his lips. Not a word does he utter that might remind his disciples of their own faithlessness in the hour of his trial; or serve to embitter them against those by whom he had been arraigned and crucified.

Though near the scene which could hardly have failed to call back the past with all its ingratitude, and perfidy, and injustice towards him, where Judas had betrayed him, and his enemies taken him, and his disciples had all forsaken him and fled; yet he thinks not of himself, but to say unto his apostles, “Ye shall be *witnesses* unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth;” and then, lifting up

*Bethany is described both by Matthew and Mark as connected with, or as a part of the Mount of Olives (Luke xix. 29: Mark xi. 1.) Robinson, 215.

those hands which had been so recently nailed to the cross, he *blessed them*; and “while he blessed them,” and “while they beheld him,” he was “taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.”*

No wonder that they were riveted to the spot, “looking steadfastly toward heaven!”

Is it not more wonderful than any of his past acts? Must it not be an illusion? Oh! can it be that he has been taken from us when but yesterday he was restored to us from the grave? O blessed, blessed Master! shall we see thee no more for ever?

But while they were thus looking up, “Behold two men stood by them in white apparel,” and thus accosted them: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”†

Who that ponders these things can be at a loss to conjecture with what adoring sentiments of love and gratitude to an unseen Saviour this angelic announcement was received by those wondering apostles?

What could have been the glowing utterance of their hearts but one symphonious response, bursting simultaneously from every lip: “*Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!*”

* Luke xxiv. 51. Acts i. 8.

† Acts i. 10, 11.

Clear and certain is it as the record itself, that “they *worshipped* him ; and returned to Jerusalem with *great joy*. And were continually in the temple *praising and blessing God*.”*

* Luke xxiv. 52, 53.

CHAPTER V.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE WITNESSES.

SUCH are the evidences of Christ's resurrection as gathered not from any one of the evangelists, but from each of them in turn, together with Paul's epistolary allusions to the event.

Only one narrative of the resurrection would not have been sufficient ; or had there been but two, however explicit and concurrent they might have been, still, considering the nature of the event, the argument from experience might have been arrayed with no little plausibility against but two narratives ; or the probability of collusion would have outweighed the credibility of their evidence.

But there are four distinct narratives of the same event, embraced in four separate biographies of the same person, by different, though contemporaneous, writers : a circumstance without a parallel in history ; and which cannot be accounted for, unless Jesus Christ actually died in Judea in the reign of Cæsar Tiberius, and unless there was a peculiarity in his mission which served not only to distinguish him from all ordinary mortals, but to

arrest universal attention, and move the hearts of men with an interest as profound as it was unwonted.

These narratives, moreover, were written after the evangelists had in the fullest manner realized the fact that Christ had risen from the dead: they themselves, having, according to his explicit directions, tarried at Jerusalem until the day of Pentecost, and then received the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Hence, in writing a narrative, they would not be apt to multiply particulars, or to accumulate proofs of an event, of which, as they had personally witnessed it, and were then consciously certain of it, there could not, in their view, have been any ground for doubt; and which was then, as they well knew, extensively known, and believed.

Hence, John says at the close of his narrative: "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

Writing independently of each other, each would vary from the other in minuter matters; yet each in turn would exhibit the same grand outline of the scene. Each might differ from the other, according to his mental habits of expression, or characteristic disposition; yet all would agree in relation to the main facts: thus unlike as narrators, though alike witnesses of the same event. One of them might

state what another omits to mention ; but an omission is no contradiction.

It does not follow, that because but one angel was seen at one time, two were not seen at another ; or because the angels were not seen by the men, that they did not appear to the women ; or because Mary Magdalene ran first to Peter and John, that she did not afterwards on seeing the Lord in the garden, go immediately back, and tell all the disciples whom she could find.

As well might it be said that Christ could not have had such a conversation with Peter as John has detailed, or Luke would have mentioned it ; that the story of the priests and elders as given by Matthew is improbable, because Mark has made no mention of it !

But it is one thing to encounter difficulties in comparing authorities, and another to detect a falsehood : one thing to be unable to trace every link in a chain of circumstances, and another to show that the witnesses to a fact contradict each other. If they agree in their testimony as to the fact itself that Christ actually appeared to them and to others after his death and burial, then the circumstantial variety which is so obvious in their respective narratives only proves that the one did not copy from the other, and that there was no sinister agreement among them to originate a story.

Even distinct things might easily be confounded by any one who would attempt to give an account

of an event which is either attended or rapidly followed by a combination of varied and unusual circumstances : especially when the intelligence of the event has caused the most extraordinary excitement : and indeed, so early on the morning of the resurrection, it is but natural to suppose that there was the most tumultuous haste among the disciples, and frequent passing to and from the sepulchre.

It is not difficult to imagine that the disciples ran about like persons distracted ; and he who can read the narratives of the evangelists without making due allowance for the mental agitation into which the disciples were thrown in consequence of the reports and visions on that memorable morn, cannot understand the circumstances in which they were placed ; much less appreciate the relation which they had sustained to the crucified Jesus ; and would not have been convinced of the fact that Christ rose from the dead, though he himself had then lived, and had actually seen “the place where the Lord lay.”

It is their faithfulness to nature, to the workings of this heart within us, that brings home to us the conviction that those narrators of the resurrection-scene were not the writers of fiction, but eye-witnesses to facts.

That those women should have fled from the sepulchre trembling and speechless ; that Mary should have wept because they had taken away her Lord, and she knew not where they had laid him ;

that she should have mistaken Jesus for the gardener ; that the apostles were slow of heart to believe ; that they treated the reports of the women as “ idle tales ” and “ believed not ; ” that they were terrified and affrighted at the sudden appearance of Jesus, and supposed that they had seen a spirit ; and after he had showed them his hands and his feet, thus proving his own physical identity, that still “ they believed not for joy, and wondered ; ” and that again under other circumstances, “ they durst not ask him, Who art thou ? knowing that it was the Lord ! ” never was man’s nature exhibited with truer, finer touches. No writer could have invented circumstances with such nice discrimination ; or thus revealed to us the inmost hearts of those desponding disciples, had he himself not known what it was to mourn a Saviour crucified ; and then, and so unexpectedly, what it was to believe in a risen, ascended Lord !

Throughout these narratives there can be detected no straining after effect, and no anxiety to be believed. No remark is amplified, and no incident exaggerated ; but every thing is briefly stated, simply expressed, unartistically arranged, and life-like in detail ; while the time, the persons, the places, the events both before and after the resurrection, its effect on Christ’s enemies as well as on his friends, all are so indissolubly interwoven with his previous history as to form with it one connected, consistent whole.

Thus, it might have seemed improbable to us that the priests and rulers should have invented so ridiculous a story, and bribed the guard to circulate it, had not the narrative undesignedly disclosed the motive by which they were actuated.

So, too, it might have appeared strange that the women should have been the first to visit the sepulchre, and that so very early in the morning, had they not previously to the Sabbath agreed to embalm the body.

Or that Christ should have appeared first of all to a *woman* might have served to throw discredit on the fact of his resurrection, were we unable to perceive that he would have acted inconsistently with himself had he not been forward to assuage the mourner's grief.

The same after his resurrection as before his death, he who had himself wept at the grave of Lazarus, could not have seen the grateful, loving Mary, so passionately weeping at the door of the sepulchre, and not spoken a word of comfort to her sorrow-stricken heart.

Thus, while the incident invests the character of Christ with additional lustre, and even shadows forth the beneficent end of his Divine mission, it discloses in beautiful harmony the remarkable fact, that woman, who was first in the transgression, was the first to proclaim the joyful tidings of a risen Jesus, a pardoning God!

Had not these women been so desirous of em-

balming the body as soon as the Sabbath was over, none of the disciples who had witnessed the crucifixion, and seen the great stone rolled against the door of the sepulchre, would have gone there so early, if at all ; and thus the most important testimony to the fact that *early* on the morning of the third day, the body was not where it had been laid after it was taken down from the cross, would have been wanting.

In a matter also, so deeply involving the question of *his* personal identity whom the angels said had risen, and had gone out from the sepulchre, whose testimony could have been so essential as that of the women, who, having long known Jesus, had often scanned his features, and listened to his voice with the intensest interest ; who had lingered latest at the sepulchre on the evening of his burial, and returned at the earliest dawn on “ the first day of the week ” to pay their last offices to his mortal remains ?

But that the angels should have made themselves visible only to these women, is indeed a singular circumstance, unless it was that the women arrived at the sepulchre immediately after the soldiers had fled, and that it might be immediately announced to them that Christ was risen before the soldiers had time to circulate the priests’ story.

Perhaps, these angels were kindly directed to remain, and to explain to these wondering women the enigma of the missing body, so that they might

be expecting ere long to behold their lost Lord, and not be unprepared to receive him brought back again to life ; and also that by their means,—they forthwith communicating what the angels had said, Peter, and John, and others might be brought yet early to the sepulchre to see and know for themselves that the body of Jesus was no longer there ; and thus be furnished with the primary proofs of the fact which were so essential to their own ultimate assurance that he had indeed risen from the dead.

The intervention of angels, strange as it may seem to us, was not foreign to the Jewish mind ; and if an angel appeared to Jesus when he was in his agony in the garden, and then strengthened him, much more would angels have been in attendance on his resurrection-bed. They had announced to women his birth ; and there was a propriety therefore in their being employed to announce to the women who came early to the sepulchre, the tidings of his resurrection.

But among those women, one is not there whom we might have expected to have been among the foremost. Mary Magdalene is mentioned, and the other Mary, the mother of Joses, and Salome, and Joanna, and others with them ; but no mention is made of Mary, the mother of Jesus !

But from the allusion to her during the scene of the crucifixion, it is probable that she had not so soon recovered from the natural effect of a scene

which to her above all others, although all the disciples felt it painfully enough, was distressing in the extreme.

It was his sympathy with her sufferings that led Jesus to commit her to John's special care; and with all a mother's heart, so wounded by the nails which had pierced *those hands*, she was in all probability still at John's home, whither he had borne her away from the cross: too much overcome by what she had seen, to go out early, if at all, on the morning of the third day.

Had she been at the sepulchre, however, the risen Jesus must have said to her as he did to Mary: "Touch me not."

He had replied to some who, on one occasion had told him that his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is (as dear to me as) my brother and sister and mother;" and therefore perhaps his mother according to the flesh would have been to him after his resurrection no dearer than any of his disciples; nor would he in his risen body have probably sustained to her any other relation than he did to them.

But an idea of this nature would hardly have occurred to the mind of a fictitious writer; and hence, had the resurrection-scene been an invention of the fancy, it is quite certain that the mother of Jesus would have been at least mentioned; and not unlikely that Jesus would have been represented as appear-

ing *first* to her, instead of to the woman out of whom "he had cast seven devils."

It is not known whether he appeared at all to his mother after his resurrection; and if he did, the notice of it was wisely withheld from the sacred page, so that none might pay her more homage than was due to any other disciple; that there might be not the shadow of a scriptural reason for worshipping her who, though "honoured among women," was never ranked by the risen Jesus above the women who came early to the sepulchre.

We have no ground to suppose that he even took leave of his mother. She is not mentioned as having been among those whom he gathered together in solemn, final interview with him on the mount from which he ascended; and it is not till after their return to Jerusalem, and we see them assembled in "an upper room" that we meet with "Mary the mother of Jesus;" or that mention is made of "his brethren."

She, with them, is *at prayer!* "Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James: these all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication *with Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*"*

This fact may not be noticed by those who would exalt Mary to higher homage than they would pay

* Acts i. 12-14.

to Christ. Let them blot the record ; or withhold it from the astonished gaze of those whom Anti-christ has inveigled into the adoration of the virgin. But he who loves truth will ponder the recorded fact. He who would know whether Christ did indeed rise from the dead, will prize the fact : for without it, the evangelical account of the resurrection were incomplete ; and with it, we have certain proof that those apostles had seen and heard what they solemnly affirm they did see and hear before their recent return to Jerusalem, and assembling in “that upper room.”

Had Jesus not risen from the grave, and ascended to heaven, those apostles, though eleven in all, could not have palmed the lie *on his kindred* according to the flesh : “Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethren,” had not been with them in “that upper room ;” and much less continued with them in prayer and supplication !

CHAPTER VI.

CREDIBILITY OF THE WITNESSES.

SUCH, then, is the testimony of the witnesses to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Now in order to estimate the value of their testimony, it may be observed that, if they were not devoid of common sense, they must have been as competent to judge whether a person whom they knew to be dead has come to life again, as whether a person whom they knew to be alive one day was dead the next.

Whether a man is living, or is dead, is to be determined by the evidence of the senses; and no man, whether learned or unlearned, in the ordinary use of his senses, need be, if indeed he ever is, deceived. If the cessation of all colour, and warmth, and motion certifies death beyond the possibility of doubt, then the return of warmth, and colour, and motion, and speech, and action in the same subject would furnish equally complete and indubitable evidence of restoration to life; and if a man has sense enough to judge in the one case, so has he in the other. He who by the intuition of his

senses can discern the difference between a dead man, and a living man, may know to a certainty whether the dead man is still dead, or has become a living man.

It will not be denied then, that the witnesses to Christ's resurrection were as competent to judge of a fact of this nature, as we should have been, had we stood in the same relation to Christ.

Did they see him die, and know that he was dead? Did they see where he was buried? Did they see, and know this same Jesus, their own Master, alive again?

We answer, that they could not have been deceived as to his death. He was designedly put to death by judicial authority, and in a way most harrowing to their sensibilities, and which could have left in their minds no doubt of the fact; and the very reason why his legs were not broken after he was taken down from the cross, to which he had been nailed for several hours, was that he "was dead already."*

Yet one of the soldiers, as if to make assurance doubly sure, plunged a spear into his side, piercing the *pericardium*, so that "forthwith came thereout blood and water:"† thus proving that death must instantly have ensued had he not been already dead.

Indeed, it was the recollection of this fearful wound which he must himself have witnessed, that

* John xix. 32.

† Ib. 34.

impelled Thomas to reject, with instant and unconquerable decision, the united testimony of all his fellow-disciples to a fact which to his mind was impossible.

Nor could they have been deceived as to the place where Christ's body was laid. The remains of the malefactors that had been crucified with him were probably thrown into the "Potter's field." But at the urgent request of Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate ordered the body of Jesus to be delivered up to him; and he laid it in his own tomb which he had hewn out in the rock, a new tomb "wherein never man before was laid;"* and they all knew that they buried him there; and the Galilean "women also followed after," it is said,† "and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid." Consequently the body of Jesus could not have been mistaken for some other body; and none of them could have been deceived as to the fact that that identical body was missing on the morning of the third day: for the sepulchre was then tenantless!

Nor could they afterwards have mistaken a phantom for the risen Jesus. An illusion of the senses is by no means impossible; and in relation to whatever has been ardently desired or long expected by one, and which has taken full possession of the imagination, an illusion is not improbable.

* Matt. xxvii. 58-61.

† Luke xxiii. 50-55.

But in relation to a *matter of fact* wholly unlooked for ; a fact which falls under the cognizance of the senses ; which admits of close and repeated scrutiny ; for the examination of which, with all its attendant circumstances, ample time is given, and every suitable means employed, it is to the last degree improbable that any man in his senses should be deluded ; and physically impossible that any number of men together should be deluded, and at the same time testify to the same illusion.

An illusion of the senses is the delusion of an individual mind ; not the clear, calm conviction of many minds, consequent on the united evidence of their separate senses.

All illusions in relation to the marvellous are traceable to some one person, and because they are unsupported by the ocular testimony of some other person who had the same opportunity of judging of the phenomenon, they are pronounced to be illusions.

But history may be searched in vain for an illusion under which two or more persons have simultaneously laboured ; and if there could be unexceptionable testimony to such an illusion as to a matter of fact, it would follow that no man can with certainty discriminate between phantoms and realities : a conclusion, we need not say, utterly at variance with the facts of consciousness, and with the testimony of experience, opposed even by the whole course of human action.

It is not merely improbable, therefore, that the apostles should have been deceived by their own senses when the risen Jesus stood before them, and they heard him speak, and saw him eat, and felt his hands and his feet. With such proofs submitted to all their senses, it was not possible for them to be deceived; and had there been but *two* witnesses to the reappearance of the crucified Jesus, and he had given them the same sensible proofs of his being alive again, and being the very same person that he was known to have been before his death, such independent, positive, and agreeing testimony to a fact, if not rebutted by contrary evidence, would suffice to decide the most important question of fact that ever came before a court of civil justice.

But in this case, there were *eleven* prominent witnesses, all agreeing in their testimony to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The several appearances of the risen Jesus were to them personally: at first to one; then to two; and then again to all of them, until his appearance was familiar to their observation; nor did any of these witnesses believe that he had risen, until they had had the evidences of their own senses to the fact, unless we except the apostle John, though he did not believe until the sight of the grave-clothes, so carefully folded up, and laid aside in the sepulchre, flashed upon his mind the conviction that the missing body could not have been stolen.

He was seen by certain women also, as well as by the eleven disciples. He was seen at different times, and in different places, and by different persons during a period of forty days; and once by about five hundred at the same time and place. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses."*

Now, however imperfect the acquaintance which the disciples in general might have had with Jesus, there can be no doubt that eleven of them knew him intimately. They had been with him from the beginning; they had gone out and in with him all the time of his ministry on earth.

We need not tell those men that before they can be admitted to testify to a fact of this nature, they must prove that they are all competent to judge whether Jesus himself had actually risen.

They knew as well as we do, that no one could be a competent witness in the case who had not enjoyed a long and intimate acquaintance with Jesus prior to his crucifixion. They themselves would admit no man to testify who had not "seen the Lord" both before and after his resurrection.

No one could be an *apostle* who had not been an eye-witness to the fact of the resurrection; and hence when an election was to be made of some suitable person to supply the place of Judas who had "gone to his own place," and to restore the number of the apostles to Christ's original desig-

* Acts ii. 32.

nation, Peter standing in the midst of "one hundred and twenty disciples" who had assembled after the ascension, addressed them in these remarkable words: "Wherefore, of these men who have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."*

There were numerous eye-witnesses then; and there might have been a larger number collected on the occasion of the apostolic election, had it not been that far the larger proportion of the five hundred to whom Christ appeared, resided in Galilee; and it may be that but few comparatively had the time or the opportunity to go to Jerusalem so soon after the ascension.

But though the apostles had followed Christ's ministry, and had been most deeply interested in his character and works, they cannot be justly regarded as being either prejudiced or credulous witnesses.

Alike with their countrymen, they had looked on "him who should come," as a temporal Prince who should lead Israel on to victory and renown; and they were not prepared to see him at last die the death of the vilest malefactor. "Be it far from thee, Lord," said Peter, when Christ told them that the Jews would crucify him, and put him to death, "this shall not be unto thee."

* Acts i. 21, 22.

It was so contrary to all they had expected of their Messiah that they could not comprehend the import of Christ's "saying," though it was uttered several times ; and hence when he was arrested, they fled ; when he was condemned, and executed, they gave up in despair. Ah, "we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel ;" and now he is dead and buried !

In this state of mind therefore, they could have had no more idea of ever seeing him again, than of welcoming back to life either of the thieves that had been crucified with him.

Notwithstanding their Lord's prediction, the possibility of his literally "rising again" no more occurred to them, than it did to the priests and elders, who remembered the saying only to guard the sepulchre, lest the disciples should steal his body, and thus contrive to infect the public mind with the idea that he had indeed risen from the dead.

Or, if the "saying" of Jesus had occurred to the apostles when his body was laid in the tomb, their agitation of mind must have been too great to admit of their accrediting what, under other circumstances, and in the very presence of their blessed Master, they had failed even to understand.

Hence, as we have seen, they were slow to believe, when there was every reason to believe ; difficult to be convinced, though proofs of the fact were constantly accumulating.

The reports of the women seemed unworthy of

credence. The testimony of Peter, and then that of "the two disciples" caused them to wonder only the more, and they believed not: one of them stoutly resolving that he would accept of no evidence short of that which the senses alone can give; and the very first time that Jesus appeared in person to the body of the disciples, so far from welcoming him, we have seen that they were affrighted: thinking as was perfectly natural for men of their habit and mood of mind to think, that it was not Jesus, but his ghost!

It is the nature of despondency to close the heart against the means of its own relief; and Jesus was even constrained to upbraid them for their unbelief. It was no easy task even for him to overcome their obstinate resistance, and dissipate their gloomy fears; nor did they yield their cordial assent until it is evident that they might as well have questioned each other's individual existence, as deny the fact that Jesus Christ himself who was crucified, dead, and buried, *now stands before them!*

If Jesus gave them the proofs of his resurrection which all the four evangelists state that he did, it matters not whether they were all as impressible as Peter, or as slow of heart as those dwellers at Emmaus; as loving as John, or as skeptical as Thomas, there could have been no difference in their verdict; no unequal degrees of conviction in their minds, so long as they were sane men with the ordinary faculties and senses of men.

All possibility of doubt was excluded when they saw the same face, and the same form; saw the prints of the nails both on his hands and his feet; saw and pressed the wound in his side, saw him, too, in the breaking of bread; heard his words of peaceful salutation; recognized his voice; followed his directions; notified others where he would meet them; travelled themselves a distance of eighty miles to meet him according to his own appointment; returned again to Jerusalem where he then more particularly instructed them; went with him to Bethany, and Olivet, and there received his last commands; and then, steadfastly beholding him, saw him taken up from earth out of their sight.

Behold them, again assembled in that very room where they had so often met with Jesus, where but yesterday they had met him for the last time, and heard him speak “of things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

Behold them, *praying* there as men had never prayed before, *in the name*, and *for the sake*, of Jesus!

See them, “when the day of Pentecost was fully come, all with one accord in one place,” and “all filled with the Holy Ghost,” and each in turn “speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Hear them proclaiming to the representatives of every nation under heaven, and to each “in

his own language” “the wonderful works of God.”*

Hear them preaching repentance for the remission of sins, in the name of Jesus Christ.

See them performing miracles in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark how their hearers are “pricked in their hearts;” and how they cried out “Men and brethren, What shall we do?” And how the apostles baptized them in the name of Jesus: yea, and on that same day which they had been directed to wait for, on which the promise of their ascended Lord was to be verified, how they then baptized in the name of Jesus “about three thousand souls” who “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”†

How wonderful the change which, in so brief a space, has come over their minds and hearts, since the dark hour of their trial, when He whom they had followed was nailed to the cross!

How wonderful that they should teach and do, what they had not the most remote conception of doing when Jesus was put to death, what Christ himself was never known to tell them before his death!

How wonderful that Jews should offer prayers, and utter doctrines so strange to Jewish ears! That Galileans should speak fluently and intelligi-

* Acts ii. 1-13.

† Acts ii. 37-42.

bly to any foreigner in his own native tongue ! That men, who had never before spoken in public, should address an audience, mixed and numerous as it was, with all the self-possession of experience, and all the overmastering power of the most studied oratory ! That men whose only skill had been in mending the fisher's net, should cure diseases which the observation of all Judea had pronounced desperate ! Above all ; that a promiscuous throng of people from other countries, as well as of Jerusalem, should, as it were, at the bidding of these recently commissioned apostles, repent of their sins, especially of the sin *of having crucified the Lord of glory* ; and in testimony of their faith in what these apostles had declared, receive baptism at their hands "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost !"

Wonderful ? *Inexplicable* rather, unless there was something in the life of Jesus that to their minds bespoke a heaven-born origin and a Divine mission ; something in his death that seemed to have a solemn and momentous reference to all the members of a dying race.

What do we say ? It is inexplicable unless Christ himself did burst the bars of the sepulchre in which his crucified body was laid, and they themselves had *seen him* "after that he was risen from the dead ;" and Christ had then taught them as no one else in all the world could have done ; had commanded them to preach and to baptize

in his name; had endowed them with the power which he himself had been known to exercise while he was on earth; and had given unto them the Spirit of all truth and grace, which before his ascension, according to his own declaration, he had promised to pour out upon them on the day of Pentecost.

If ever a body of men had the amplest possible reasons to be convinced of any event, these apostles had such reasons for being convinced that Jesus Christ rose from the dead! Whatever else they might have been, they were not prejudiced, and much less credulous witnesses for Christ. On grounds, such as we have no more than barely alluded to, "gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."*

In view of the proofs to which they could refer, it is clear that they did not render themselves justly obnoxious to the charge of either arrogance or dogmatism when they said: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ; but were eye-witnesses of his majesty."† "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life, that declare we unto you."‡

* Acts iv. 33.

† 2 Peter i. 16.

‡ 1 John i. 1-3.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WITNESSES CHOSEN.

ADMITTING then, that the number of the apostles, and the nature of the evidence that was submitted to them, both separately and collectively, render it, to say the least, most improbable that they could have been deceived in relation to the event; may it not be viewed as a suspicious circumstance that all the so-called witnesses had been previously enrolled among Christ's followers? Why, it is asked, did he not make himself known to the full conviction of those who had not been his disciples?

As well might it have been asked, why he did not immediately perform some other miracle to convince of his Messiahship those who did not believe in him, even when they saw Lazarus come forth from the grave at his omnipotent command.

It was after witnessing this wondrous work, that the priests and Pharisees said in their council: "He doeth many miracles; if we let him alone all men will believe on him;" and "from that day they took counsel together to put him to death."* Hav-

* John xi. 49-53.

ing rejected such evidence, they could not reasonably have demanded more; nor consistently with the nature of his claims, or their own responsibility to God, could Christ have given them more.

It followed from the very nature of Christ's mission that, whilst all serious and honest truth-seekers might understand and receive the teachings of his miracles, they who were desirous of evading moral obligation, should, though seeing, see not, and though hearing, hear not.

But if it was difficult for him to remove the doubts of those who had long known him, and whose unwillingness to admit that he was risen, arose simply from the fact that they had seen him put to death, and could therefore no longer hope against hope; much more difficult would it have been to convince those of the fact of his resurrection who had seen him but seldom; who had even been accessory to his death, and were most virulently opposed to the doctrines which he had taught.

It were unreasonable then to suppose that the risen Jesus would have appeared to his enemies; and if it be thought that for his own sake, to show his superiority to all personal injury, and his disinterested regard for their salvation, he should have appeared to all the Jews, whether they had favoured or opposed his mission, then, by parity of reasoning, he should have immediately made himself known to the whole world: he should come

in person to every individual of every successive generation down to the end of time !

Thus it appears that to throw suspicion on the credibility of the witnesses simply because they had all been Christ's disciples, is in effect to disparage the proofs of a written revelation, if not to deny its very possibility.

Christ had given to all his countrymen the amplest opportunities to ascertain the nature and grounds of his claims to the Messiahship ; and now his work on earth, that work which the Father had given him to do, is done. He will himself teach the people no more. Never again will the scribes and Pharisees hear his voice rebuking their hypocrisies, nor sinners calling them to repentance. Never again will the promiscuous multitude see him work another miracle in attestation of his word.

All was finished when he gave up the ghost ; and now that he has risen, it but remains to commit to faithful men "the glorious gospel of the grace of God."

He could die *but once* for "the sin of the world ;" and as "he made an offering of himself once for all," so to answer then, and in all after times, the great end of his Redemptive Act, it was necessary that he should rise from the grave ; and not more so, than that he should certify the fact of his having risen to some persons in particular.

And whom should he have selected, if not men of

sound minds, taken not only from the ranks of the people, but from among those who had been with him from the beginning? And how many should he have selected, if *twelve separate witnesses* be not enough to establish any fact? though to these might be added both Luke and Mark; and Paul also, who, though “born out of due time” was not “a whit behind the very chiefest apostle.”

But whoever might be employed to testify to Christ’s resurrection, must have “infallible signs” of his personal re-appearance among them; or they will hardly attempt to make others believe what they are by no means certain of themselves: they must have an intimate acquaintance with the mind and will of their risen Lord; a full knowledge of all things pertaining to his kingdom; and be in every respect qualified both to testify to what they have seen, and to write and publish an accurate account at once of his life and death, of his resurrection and ascension: so that the sons of men in all after times might have “a perfect understanding of all things from the first.”

If any were thus selected, and thus qualified for the task, they would testify to the fact; they would proclaim it far and wide in every tongue, make it known to the foes as well as to the friends of Jesus, write about it, as well as speak of it: they would seize the most public occasions, and favourable opportunities for giving their testimony; entreat the people to hear; challenge inquiry; defy refutation;

and their testimony, if worthy of being received, would be confirmed by miracles wrought by them in the name of Him whom the priests and rulers had “crucified and slain.”

It was necessary, then, that Christ should appear after his resurrection only to those whom he had chosen to be the special witnesses of the fact.

Hence, Peter said : “Him God raised up, and shewed him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead; and he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify.”*

Hence, “the word of the Lord was published” both to Jew and to Gentile; and “signs and wonders” were wrought by the apostles of Jesus in attestation of the truth of their doctrines.†

Hence, there are now extant, in twenty-seven parts, different writings which were composed by eight different persons not many years after the events which they have recorded; and that there was no pre-concert among them, and no undue haste, is evident from the respective dates of their separate writings.

Though Matthew wrote his account within six or eight years after the crucifixion; and Mark his, and under the eye of Peter, about the year of our Lord *sixty-one*; and Luke followed some two years after “to set forth in order a declaration of those

* Acts x. 40-42.

† Acts xiv. 3.

things which were most surely believed," yet John, the last surviving apostle, did not complete his testimony until after an interval of about thirty years.*

Not to dwell, however, on the written testimony of different witnesses ; yet within a very few years after the crucifixion, how great an amount of oral testimony must have been delivered by the apostles to the fact of the resurrection, how demonstrative must have been their arguments, how weighty their appeals, how conclusive their miraculous works when so many of their countrymen could in one day give up their Sabbaths, their Temple, and their Priests ; and in their stead, adopt the Christian Sabbath with its simple ordinances of prayer and praise, and of "the breaking of bread!"

But if, notwithstanding all the supernatural proofs with which the apostolic doctrine was accompanied, the priests and rulers, so far from acknowledging their sin in having "crucified the Lord of glory," could command the witnesses not to preach in the name of Jesus, and could threaten them with stripes and bonds if they did ; nay, within a brief period after the day of Pentecost, cause one of the witnesses to be put to death, or connive at the murderous deed,† is it to be gravely supposed that they would have believed on Christ had he only

* A. D. 97. See in this connection, *Mosheim's Commentaries*, vol. i. pp. 113, 114. Schaff's *History of Christian Church*, p. 255-6.

† Acts vii. 54-60.

shown himself to them after the resurrection? And because he did not, is the testimony of those to whom he did show himself to be received with distrust and suspicion?

These rulers and Pharisees had once said, "Show us a sign and we will believe;" and when the sign was given, what said they? "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils!"

But show us a sign *from heaven*, said they; and a sign from heaven was given: Christ, by a voice from heaven, was declared to be "the Son of God;" and did they not then believe? Far from it: they charged him with blasphemy "because he had made himself equal with God."

The fact is, their unbelief was as wilful and persistent as their malignity was unrelenting; and now, in the accomplishment of their dark purpose, these same priests and rulers, these bigoted and desperate Pharisees, are pressing round the cross of their victim.

See how they scourge him, and spit upon him, and revile him! Hear their challenge: "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Christ *did more: he came up alive from the grave*, though they themselves had so carefully and strongly guarded his dead body; and they knew that their guard had kept the most vigilant watch; they *knew* that that body could not have been taken away without the knowledge of their guard; and though they had not believed his words, they knew

that Christ had risen ; and did they then embrace him as their Messiah ? No ; they told the soldiers to lie for them, and to say that his disciples stole him away while they slept.

So true is it, that a man's bigoted attachments and evil passions may close his mental eye to all the radiance of noon-tide certainty ; and hence it is that no facts which involve a moral truth can be accompanied with irresistible evidence. Christianity, as portrayed in the New Testament, labours under no more disadvantage now than Christianity did when its Founder moved in all his spotless purity and God-like beneficence among the hills of Galilee ; or lifted up his voice in the streets of Jerusalem to make known to its inhabitants the mighty works and true sayings of God.

Man's heart may be fortified against all the evidences with which Christianity urges its claims ; and when, as in the case of a Paul, God's grace interposes, it is not to impart other or clearer evidences ; it is only to humble, and to soften man's proud and obdurate heart : thus endowing it, as it were, with a capacity for admitting evidence, and receiving the truth in the love of it.

CHAPTER VIII.

HYPOTHESES OF INFIDELITY.

NOR were these priests and elders more forward to cloak their own sin by impeaching the honesty of the disciples, than infidels have ever been to disparage the character of Christ's "chosen witnesses."

"*Chosen* witnesses? Say rather downright enthusiasts: for all enthusiasts have regarded themselves as the favourites of Heaven."

And it must be admitted that the apostles have exposed themselves to the charge of enthusiasm, in having styled themselves the "chosen witnesses," *unless* they had been chosen, and had had certain evidence of the fact.

But from all that we can gather of their history, we know that they were not self-moved to follow Christ, but called by him; that they did not derive their views of the kingdom of God from internal suggestions, but from Christ's teachings; and that their apprehensions of the nature of his kingdom were never clear until some time after his resurrection, they had received the gift of the Holy Ghost.

We know, too, that it was no easy matter for Christ to disabuse their minds of the prejudices of their education; and yet, that at last their views of him were only in accordance with the prophetic teachings of their own Scriptures; and in relation to the fact of the resurrection, we have already seen that they were strangely slow to believe, most difficult to be convinced; and not convinced until all doubt was morally impossible.

Having been instructed by Christ, they aimed to teach others only what they had themselves been taught: having submitted their own wills to his authority, they would have others follow them, but only so far as they followed Christ; and no more doubting what they had seen and heard from Christ than their own personal existence, they were never backward to refer inquirers to the absolute grounds of their own belief.

In support of the novel doctrines which they advanced, they appealed to facts which were known to others as well as to themselves; and to miracles which they publicly wrought, not in their own name, but in that of Jesus of Nazareth.

In neither their narratives of events, their epistles to converts, their addresses to the public, nor in their controversies with either the Jews or the Greeks, can there be detected any traces of a blind zeal, or an ungoverned fancy; and in the whole course of their history, there is not an instance of

their appealing to their own impressions and feelings in order to convince others.

They thought clearly without effort ; reasoned closely without dogmatism ; spoke forcibly without vociferation, and expressed themselves simply and with brevity.

Their writings can now be read and re-read by all who love to ponder truth, with the same fresh interest that the lover of nature feels when he returns to gaze on scenes which, however familiar to his eye, never lose their charm to his heart.

But without that tuition which they had enjoyed, the scenes which they had witnessed, and the powers with which they were endowed, had they merely felt themselves to be the subjects of some immediate and extraordinary communications from Heaven, as is always the case with religious enthusiasts, how differently would they have appeared ; and with what different sentiments must their writings have been viewed : if, indeed, their writings had survived till now to indicate in the remote past a remarkable period of religious delusion !

Enthusiasm has its origin in unfounded impressions ; and is a persuasion of the truth of the mind's own imaginings in relation to religious matters, independently of either reason or fact. It sees without light, knows without knowledge, and believes without proof ; and the poor enthusiast accordingly is sure simply because he is sure, and ex-

pects to be believed by all the world because he himself believes; and hence imperiously enjoins his own internal suggestions, or groundless fancies, as matters of implicit faith and obedience.

Not so men who “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Moved to what? To narrate the life and death, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the acts of the apostles; to reveal the mind and will of God to man through him whom God had sent, that we might have “a perfect understanding of all things from the very first,” and “know the certainty of those things” as they were “delivered to those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word;” “and might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;” and that believing *we* “might have life through his name.”*

These men of Galilee were never moved but to speak forth “the words of truth and soberness,” so that those who heard them, and those who could only read what they had been moved to write, might “prove all things and hold fast that which is good.”

Enthusiasm, sooner or later, allies itself with fanaticism. It is as proud and boastful as it is impulsive and dogmatic; and may be sour and malignant.

He who is wedded to fancy rather than to fact, and loves self more than truth, will both unduly extol, and perversely disparage; loving only those

* Luke i. 1-4. 1 John v. 13.

who favour his object ; hating and reviling all who oppose.

How strange is it then, that these followers of Jesus should have recorded his history with all its wonderful passages, and superhuman excellencies without a note of exclamation, and much less a word of panegyric on their leader : he too the most extraordinary personage the world had ever seen ! when, though they saw him put to a death of agony and shame, and knew the motives by which his enemies had been actuated, that not an expression of anger, nor even a censure should have escaped their lips.

This is not all : no men ever had more reason for self-complacent exultation than these same witnesses.

By their teachings which arrested listening crowds ; by their miracles which none could deny, and but few pervert ; by their fortitude which enabled them to endure all things for the sake of Christ ; by their perseverance which triumphed over all obstacles, they attained an influence over mind which no limits could define, and which the lapse of ages has not been able to impair.

Before this, what were they but fishermen, tax-gatherers, and tent-makers ? and who would not be lifted up in heart, if raised so suddenly to distinction, and renown ? Yet humility and self-renunciation were prominent traits in their character.

Some of them do not mention their own names ; and John speaks of himself as “ that other disciple whom Jesus loved.”

Paul, when constrained to vindicate his apostleship, lest the Christian cause would suffer through him, declares “ boasting to be folly :” that “ not he who commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth ;” that in his self-vindication, necessary as it was, he had “ become a fool in glorying ;” that he was not meet to be an apostle ;* and once having occasion to advert to his labours, he checks himself, and adds with unfeigned modesty, “ Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

Though thus inspired to write and to preach, they did not presume on the Divine favour, or conclude that they could not come short of the “ prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus ;” but feared, aye, these chosen witnesses feared, lest, after all, they themselves should “ be castaways,” because they knew that they were “ men of like passions” with others.

What is still more striking, and admits of no explanation in consistency with the supposition that they were enthusiasts, they have put on record the faults wherewith they were chargeable, and on account of which they were rebuked : their unbelief, their pride, their emulations, their disputes, their cowardice, and their desertion of their Master in

* See 2 Cor. x. xi.

the hour of his need. Peter's denial is no less conspicuous in their narrative than Judas' treachery.

There is another hypothesis, and it is the last to which Infidelity can have recourse.

The crucifixion, having caused great lamentation among Christ's followers, and a frantic jubilee among his enemies, could not have been forgotten in a day. Months, if not years, may roll away, and not a few among that "great company of people" who followed on to Calvary will remember that piteous spectacle; nor will some at least among the multitude of Christ's enemies forget how it was that they effected his execution; and why it was that they had so strictly guarded the sepulchre where his body was laid.

Never had the mind of a people been so agitated by conflicting sentiments; never had rulers rendered themselves so perilously liable to be judged for their own judicial acts; and they knew that they were; and hence were only the more anxious that he whom they had crucified should be the occasion of no more popular excitement.

Now, aside from the fact that the disciples had been scattered "like sheep without a shepherd," none of them could have been ignorant of the influences which resulted in the death of their Master; and had any among them, whether for their own vindictive gratification, or to reinstate themselves in the estimation of the community, been

disposed to circulate a groundless rumour that Christ had risen from the dead, they must have been devoid of the ordinary qualifications of impostors had they not broached the story at first in some far distant place, and so returned with caution to Jerusalem; or had they not postponed all overt measures to effect their end, until the tragic scenes of Calvary had ceased to stir the public mind, and the prominent actors in that bloody drama had themselves passed off the stage. Less than knaves are they, if they can so outwit themselves as to go at once where they will certainly be detected, and forthwith arrested.

But these witnesses of Christ's resurrection, so soon as they returned from Bethany to Jerusalem made known the fact to others; and after only a few days' delay *proclaimed* it on an occasion which had drawn together men from every part of the nation: made choice of this very occasion when Jerusalem was crowded with strangers, that they might have the greatest possible number of hearers; proclaimed it, too, within six weeks after the crucifixion, and within the hearing of the holy family whom they must have personally known; within the hearing, moreover, of those who had every motive to prove, if they could, that it was false, and all the requisite authority and means to conduct a judicial examination.

It is against all human experience that some twelve men should have united in telling a mere

story of Christ's having risen, when at that very time, and in their own presence were scores of men, both of those who had followed Christ, and those who had been consenting to his death, who might with equal facility have exposed the fraud; and who, to say the least, could have had no interest in conniving at a falsehood of such a nature.

It is against all the national sentiments of the Jews, moreover, that a fabrication of this nature should have originated in Jerusalem; and though mythological inventions were familiar to the Gentiles, yet had "Jesus and the Anastasis" been excogitated by some Athenian mind, the doctrine would not have been received as true, so foreign was it to the notions of those whom Paul addressed: much less, then, had it been accredited by the followers of Moses; and if it had not been *first* believed by some among the Jews, none of their brethren according to the flesh would have been converted to so novel a doctrine; and, by consequence, the Jews themselves had never published the tidings in the ear of the Gentile world.

Nor could such a story have originated at a later period than that to which the narrative refers, because it embodies certain miraculous facts which are inseparably connected with certain publications, and commemorative ordinances; and he who invented the former and forged the record of such facts, must also have contrived the latter; and it

is not possible that any people could be persuaded that they and their fathers, from the time of Christ's death, had always believed, and always observed what they had never heard of before, and knew positively that they never had observed.

Certain it is that neither "Christian baptism," nor the "Lord's supper," nor the "Lord's day" could ever have been imposed on the observance of the Jews, had the wonderful facts from which they took their rise been absolute fictions ; and he who would trace these commemorative ordinances to their origin, must go back to the period of the great events recorded in the New Testament ; or he is not only false to history, but blind to reason.

It is too obvious to be formally remarked, that Christianity must have had a *beginning* among men ; but how could it have had a beginning unless the Christian ministry and the Christian ordinances prove the *credibility* of the miraculous fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ ? And if so, then the *narratives* which embody the facts in Christ's history, *could not have been forged*.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION OF THE ARGUMENT.

HERE we might rest the argument : for it is impossible to account for the ordinances of the Christian church, nay, for the existence of the Christian sect *at any time*, unless it be a fact that Peter on the day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, (and it may be within sight of Calvary,) addressed the multitude then and there collected, and affirmed that Jesus, whom their rulers had but a short time before crucified and slain, was raised up from the dead in proof that he was “both Lord and Christ.”

Nor is this the most remarkable fact in this connection. So ample were the proofs which this witness adduced, so convincing his arguments, that as we have seen, *three thousand* of his auditors *believed*. Believed *what*? That Jesus died and *rose again*! Believed, and were baptized *into the name of Jesus*!

The apostles, therefore, must have uttered what they knew to be both truth and fact; or their so-called three thousand converts were *deceived* as men never were before. And if thousands of people, living in Jerusalem, and knowing of Christ's death; knowing too, how, and for what their rulers had compassed

his ignominious death, were so confounded in their whole mental habits of association and belief, by false representations from Christ's pretended apostles, as to abandon all their wonted modes of thinking, and rules of acting in religious matters, it were a greater miracle than that Christ should have risen from the dead; a thousand-fold more difficult of credence than that the apostles should have spoken to them "the truth in Christ" and that they were thus fairly, openly, and truly converted to the faith in the risen Jesus!

But no character is too pure for the truth-hater to asperse; no insinuation too base that will but afford a pretext for unbelief.

As the disciples were wantonly slandered by the Jewish rulers, so have these witnesses been grievously maligned, as if they had been the most daring and adroit impostors that ever lived. And they must have been so. There is now no alternative. The issue must be met. If Christ rose not on the third day after his crucifixion, those chosen witnesses were false and black as hell!

Satan himself once essayed to bring down Christ to his own level; and it is not strange that men, consciously void of principle, should question the integrity of Christ's witnesses. But there is no more reason to conclude that they were impostors, than there was for the priests and rulers to say that they were thieves.

For had they been conscious of uttering what

they knew to be false, as they must have been, if Jesus did not convince them that he had indeed risen, how could they have thought for an instant that any one would believe them? Theirs was not a story to please the fancy, and seduce the judgment; or to gratify earth-born appetites. Nothing could have been so expressly adapted to enkindle the ire of the Jew, and provoke the scorn of the Gentile. While in its relation to the teachings of Christ, it tended to nothing short of the demolition of all heathen systems of religion, it served to bring against the Jews the awful charge of having murdered God's own Son: it mortified their pride of race; struck at the root of all their bigoted attachments; dashed all their hopes of deliverance from the Roman yoke, sounded in their ear the death-knell of their national existence.

No Jew, therefore, could give credence to the apostles' story without giving up his long cherished hopes of civil freedom; turning away from that beautiful temple where his fathers had worshipped; and thus not only abandoning the ordinances of his religion, but cutting himself off from the sympathies of his brethren according to the flesh; forfeiting his possessions, and jeopardizing his life.

To combat thus with a people whose tenacious adherence to their own religious customs was equalled only by their national aversion to every other system of religious belief, a people who

through the medium of their priests and rulers had opposed Christ from the beginning of his ministry, nor desisted in their malicious work until they had seen him doomed to a felon's death, was, to say the least, a task of all others the least promising to men who had no facts to adduce in proof of their assertions.

Whatever might have been their mental qualities, or their adventitious advantages, they must have known that in such an enterprise all would be their enemies, not excepting the many who had themselves followed Christ: for it is not to be supposed that all of them could have been drawn into the plot.

They must have known, also, that they would have to face the same multitude that had so lately thronged the cross of the despised Nazarene; that they would be met and resisted by the most honourable and powerful men in the land, themselves most deeply concerned, both in honour and interest, to detect and crush the imposture; and how could they have ventured to encounter obstacles and dangers so formidable, had their testimony been false? The strength to do, to dare, to suffer, can issue only from conscious sincerity.

What were they to gain? By their own acknowledgment, they had at the outset dismissed all idea of a temporal kingdom; and in consequence of their Master's well remembered words, they had laid their account with toil, and poverty, and shame.

Nor did they affect to conceal the offence of the cross, or refrain from forewarning those who might accredit their statements, of the temporal consequences of their faith in Christ: that they too might be hated of all men for his sake.

How different were these men from any that ever before appeared in Jerusalem! No longer the observers of Jewish ordinances, yet humbly obedient to the God of Abraham: not false to Moses, and yet true to Jesus.

Theirs are no earth-born views, no vulgar sentiments. If they speak, it is as the Spirit gives them utterance. If they weep, it is because men "are enemies to the cross of Christ." If they glory, it is in "the cross of Christ," by which the world is crucified to them, and they unto the world. If they rejoice, it is that they may be "counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ." All worldly losses seem to them trivial compared to the loss of that "soul for which Christ died," all worldly gains but dross, if they may but "win Christ, and be found in him." Whether the world smile or frown, nothing shall either seduce or terrify them from the profession of their faith, and hope, and joy in Christ. Man's judgment is a little matter to them, so long as their testimony is on high, and their record in heaven. Come what may to flesh and blood, all they ask is that they may be "faithful in their testimony unto death;" and all they are looking for is "a crown of righteousness"

from the hand of their ascended Master. Unless they can rely on his promise, and look forward with the confidence of certainty to the rewards and joys of his presence in heaven, they seem to be aware that their cause is desperate, their condition deplorable.

If Christ be not risen, we are found *false witnesses* of God ; because we have testified of God *that he raised up Christ*. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”*

But in a case of this kind, we want something more than an expression of their views, and sympathies : for men may seem fair, and yet be false.

Nor is it conclusive, in evidence of their characters, that many believed their story ; for doubtless there were credulous people then as there are now, though the most credulous are not apt to be imposed on when the impostor offers to them no worldly inducements, not even a moment of gratified desire.

Nor does it necessarily follow that one's belief is true, because he submits to death, rather than recant. Various influences may combine to pervert the understanding ; and the pride of opinion may be greater at times than the love of life.

But in the case of *twelve witnesses* to a matter of fact, respecting which they could not have been deceived ; which was contrary to their expectations,

* 1 Cor. xv. 14-19.

contrary to their habits of thinking, and against all their worldly interests to make known to their countrymen ; which, without preconcert on their part, had wrought so wonderful a change in their whole mental and moral being, as impelled them to give their instant testimony to the fact, and on the very spot where the event must have occurred, if it occurred at all : in the midst of those who were under the strongest possible inducements, and had every means, to prove it false ; yea, in the hearing of all the world, in such a case, it becomes a matter of the extremest importance to know, how *they acted* after the novelty of the event had ceased to affect their imaginations, and the ardour of their first impressions had had time to abate : whether no one among them shortly faltered and grew pale ; or whether they all persisted in the same testimony in despite of dangers a thousand fold greater than any they could have anticipated.

The fearful issue which their testimony to a fact of this nature was too well adapted to provoke, has at last come. See them scorned, vilified, execrated. See them plundered, imprisoned, tortured ; and, with the single exception of the apostle John, who survived to complete the volume of their recorded testimony, all in turn put to death, foully murdered for their persistent testimony, and let him believe who can, that their testimony was an absolute fiction, wickedly invented to deceive mankind.

We cannot : any more than we can believe that

there is pleasure in pain, glory in ignominy, or a strong natural preference in man's nature of misery to comfort, or of death to life: yea, the love of all physical evils for the sake of adhering to known falsehood.

The whole course of human events, as well as man's nature, is in favour of the truth of such testimony as these witnesses gave to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and to oppose experience to their testimony because the fact involved is miraculous, is worthy only of a mind too sophistical to detect, or too trifling to admit, the self-contradiction of such an argument.

What! believe that twelve men of sound minds will suffer the deprivation of all worldly good, and cheerfully submit to toil, and poverty, and shame, and hatred, and bonds, and stripes, and a bloody death, simply and solely that they might persuade mankind to believe what they knew to be false?

But this is not the only difficulty involved in the hypothesis that the witnesses to the resurrection were impostors. He who adopts it must believe, so long as he reasons logically from his own premises, that men who thus lied against their own consciences, and abused the confidence of their fellow-men, and took God's name in vain, nevertheless portrayed in living colours a perfect image of human excellence, framed an unequalled code of morals, unfolded the clearest views of God and immortality, inculcated the purest principles, pre-

sented the noblest incentives to human action, lived themselves the holiest lives, and inspired the multitude of their followers, who had been so recently either bigoted Jews or benighted heathen, with every sentiment of love to God and good will to man !

He must admit, too, that they took as much pains, and suffered as many privations, and encountered as formidable difficulties to establish what they knew was not the fact, as they could have done, had they believed their own testimony, and their own testimony been true ; that, though men of ordinary abilities, with no education and without alliances, they contrived to deceive those whose duty and interest and honour it was to refute their story : contrived to deceive multitudes, so that, whether Jews or Greeks, they forthwith renounced the customs of their fathers, observed the first day of the week in commemoration of the story, and submitted to baptism in the name of the young man who had been so recently crucified at Jerusalem : contrived ere long to inveigle and enlist in their plot the foremost man of all Israel ! him who had been brought up after the strictest sect of the Pharisees ; who had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and had breathed out threatenings and slaughter against them, even held the clothes of the witnesses when one of their number was stoned to death ; and in connection with the subsequent life and labours of this supposed convert, even contrived to frame and publish a series of narratives and

epistles, so unartistic and life-like, so undesigned in their coincidences, and harmonious in their tenor, that no plain, straightforward, and veritable matter of fact history could bear a more rigorously critical scrutiny.

More than all this : he must admit and hold that although they could not but foresee the consequences of persisting in their conscious fabrication, and had indeed from day to day only the more certain evidence that it would plunge them into divers perils, yet that not one of them wavered or prevaricated, but were all alike firm and consistent ; as indissolubly linked together by the tie of a common falsehood held in secret between them, as if they had been united to Christ by a living faith in his resurrection, and actually commissioned by him to preach the gospel ; that with invincible resolution, when a violent death was staring them in the face, they steadfastly persevered, clinging to their conscious falsehood to the very last ; and with their last breath uttering themselves in accents of the sublimest devotion to their ascended Lord !

Christianity has indeed its mysteries as “dark with excessive light” as the throne of the Eternal ; but it offers no solecisms to our reason, no contradictions to our faith, no shadowy form to our affections.

In accordance with the Divine purpose from the beginning ; with the hope of the promise made by God unto the fathers ; with the concurring voice of

ancient prophecy ; with the import of all divinely appointed sacrifices ; yea, even with the expectation of the world at the time, of the Messiah's advent, it tells of ONE who, though "equal with God," "took upon himself the form of a servant," "being made under the law ;" and who "died for our offences and *rose again* for our justification : " and it bids us hope in him, and live unto him, and die unto him, that we ourselves may at last be raised to a new and endless life, *through him* who, before he "humbled himself" to die, declared *himself* to be THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

Blessed be "the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," for the testimony of those *chosen witnesses* ! What do we not owe to those men "of whom the world was not worthy !"

But he who denies and falsifies their testimony, what is his creed ? whence are his data ?

Alas ! if consistent with his own principles of reasoning, he knows not *whence he is*, or *whither going* !

Some day or other he must lay himself down and die ! This is all he knows with certainty ; and well may we shudder as we approach his grave, and read his epitaph :

"*From nothing I sprang, to nothing I return : all that remains of me is dust, which here mingles with its native dust.*"

CHAPTER X.

THE RELATION OF THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

FROM the manner in which the preceding argument has been conducted, this relation will be obvious to those who prize the commonly received doctrines of Christian faith: knowing, as they do, *whom* they have believed.

But as this relation, though strictly logical, has been either evaded or overlooked to the rejection or perversion of certain essential principles of belief as inculcated by the sacred writers, it may not be deemed a superfluous task to adduce a few examples in illustration of its importance.

Owing to the repulses which avowed infidelity has often encountered in its direct and unblushing assaults on Christianity, it has of late ceased to be an open question, whether such a person as Jesus Christ ever lived. As well might we doubt any universally admitted fact of ancient history as that Jesus of Nazareth was the founder of that system of religion which bears his name.

Nor is it an open question, whether he was put to death in the reign of Cæsar Tiberias by crucifixion;

and so by parity of reasoning the fact of his resurrection must be admitted ; for, though the supernatural is interwoven with the texture of the sacred narratives, the proofs are essentially of the same nature, and derivable from the same sources whether we consider his life, his death, or his resurrection.

It but remains, therefore, for men of a speculative cast of mind, or averse to the distinctive features of the gospel, to undermine by sophistry what cannot be overthrown by logical reasonings ; to explain away by fanciful analogies or preconceived notions, what by no well-known law of literary criticism, nor by any legitimate principle of hermeneutics, can be consistently denied ; to supersede by ingenious theories what must be admitted either as a matter of historical fact, or a truth according to the fair and obvious import of the phraseology in which it is couched.

Hence, on the one hand, the different theories of modern skeptics ; and on the other, the various perversions of the distinctive teachings of the Christian Scriptures : in either case, the object being the same—to preclude the admission of Christ's divinity, and the necessity of self-renouncing belief in his atoning sacrifice : thus divesting Christianity of its essential character as a remedial system for fallen man.

Nevertheless, the Christian doctrines are but the exponents of the leading facts of the New Testa-

ment. To this day, we should have had no knowledge of the doctrines, had not the events recorded by the Evangelists actually taken place, and thus passed into history; and as we cannot reject the facts without virtually discarding all belief in probable evidence, so we cannot pervert or modify the teachings of these facts—so as to bring these teachings into seeming agreement with either our intellectual preconceptions, or the affinities of self-will, without violating the analogy of the scriptural records.

Despite the “Development Theory,” the Mythical, and the more recent theory of Sensualism—so thinly veiled under the garb of Pantheism,—as we stand by the vacant sepulchre in the garden, and look back from the hour that the “great stone” was rolled against its door to the day when coming from Nazareth of Galilee “Jesus was baptized of John in Jordan,” we still have “the witness within” that we are not surrendering our mind to the pencilings of fancy, nor to the conclusions of philosophy.

Imagination cannot sketch, nor reason fathom, what the human mind, unless supernaturally illumined, could never have conceived. In vain shall we search amid the galleries of art, or the discoveries of science; amid the tomes of human erudition, the mysteries of the Oracles, the niches of the Pantheon, or even the archives of God’s ancient people for the requisite material to con-

struct the life of Jesus ; and much less for the original of a person who embodied in himself, without inconsistency, or defect, both precept and example.

See ; the form is visible ; the utterance distinct ; the action natural ; the expression life-like, man-like, God-like.

It is “ the Son of man : ” it is “ the Son of God : ” full of grace and truth : in the sublimity of his virtue himself a greater miracle than any he wrought ; who, so far from bearing any impression of the age and country in which he appeared, was more distinguished from his countrymen than the Jew from the Gentile ; to whom Moses, the greatest of the prophets, bore no higher relation than that of servant to a Son ;* to whom the angels are inferior, and whom they are charged to worship ;† whose advent was announced so far back as “ man’s fall ; ” who was pointed out by Moses himself, and with gradually increasing distinctness by all succeeding prophets, as the coming Messiah ; who was the hero of both the Patriarchal and Levitical dispensation ; and constitutes at once the perpetual theme and necessary key-stone of the Christian dispensation ; whose conception and birth-place, whose works and virtues, whose sufferings and death answer with singular minuteness to a long train of prophetic intimations ; whose character and actions, moreover, accord with whatever may be

* Heb. iii. 5, 6.

† Ib. i. 5, 6.

our abstract conceptions of infinite purity and love. There is nothing clear, no approach to definiteness in our conceptions of God except as we gaze on the face of Jesus Christ; and hence the world never had any conceptions worthy of the great God until Christ appeared: "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person."

Aside from all other considerations, and not admitting of any reasonable explanation save on grounds rather more scientific than any skeptical theory that has as yet been advanced:—He who could work the most stupendous miracles in his own name, and in sole reliance on himself; who could predict coming events not as if he had been inspired, but as an omniscient being speaks; who announced grander ideas than had ever entered the mind of either the greatest men, or the most renowned sages—in a way too that "never man spoke;" who exemplified the surpassing purity of his principles amid unparalleled temptations and trials by a life of stainless virtue and self-sacrificing love, must have been *conscious* of power, of prescience, of wisdom, of truth and of holiness—such as no man whatever his capacities, his acquirements, his moral excellence, his aptitudes, or however keen his introspection—ever detected in his own consciousness; must himself have been conscious without design, without vanity, without enthusiasm, or the possibility of mistake, that, though a man, he was essentially, in the very constitution of his

person, different from the sons of men ; as, in fact, historically he is, in the works of his power, in the utterances of his thoughts, in the acts of his life, and in the forms of his consciousness sublimely *alone* in the world's history.

An effect must have a cause ; and if within the wide domain of nature with its teachings of history, its experience of life, its well-known laws of mental development, its scientific discoveries, and inductions from facts, we can find no cause adequate to the solution of the psychological problem involved in the constitution of his person, then, as honest truth-seekers, we are bound to admit the thought that in this solitary instance there might have been a real union of divinity with the human soul.

If true to the immutable principles of credible evidence ; true rather to the inexorable logic of facts : if consistent with our necessary admission of a *first cause* uncaused, without which it is impossible to account for the phenomena of the universe, it follows that in this relation we cannot extricate the mind from a serious dilemma without having recourse to "a revealed mystery."*

Speculate as we may : bring the theories of ancient or of modern skepticism with all the boasted lights of art and science to unravel the

* *Revealed*, because never before known : *inexplicable*, because he who made it known has not thought proper to tell us *how*, or why it is.

enigma,—there can be no conclusion worthy of “this noble reason” which God has given us for higher ends than to idolize and immortalize self, much less relief from heavy thoughts of the future of our moral being,—but in the light of that ever-memorable morn when the angelic messenger who had said to the *virgin*—“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, and that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God,”* then proclaimed to the women who had come early to the sepulchre: “He is not here, for he is risen *as he said*. Come, see the place where *the Lord* lay.”†

As all presumptive arguments in favour of his being able to verify his own word, that the third day after his decease he would rise again, would have been fatally wanting as well as irrelevant, had he not been seen to be singularly different from all born of woman; and incomparably superior to any one previous to his advent who had appeared as a prophet sent of God, so, by his resurrection, is all doubt dispelled. “The Divine-human” in all the mystery, but incontestable reality of his matchless, ineffable personality, stands *revealed*.

Hence throughout the sacred records, from first to last, all is in keeping with this wondrous idea of the incarnate Word. Every saying that fell from his lips; every miracle that he wrought; every

* Luke i. 35.

† Matt. xxviii. 6.

precept that he at once taught and exemplified ; every expression that either irradiated or shaded his countenance ; every prophecy respecting the Messias ; every angelic announcement ; every apostolic doctrine ; every tribute of *praise* to him, whether from holy men on earth, or from “the spirits of just men made perfect ;” from “the witnesses under the altar,” or from “the four and twenty elders” who bow before “the throne ;” every manifestation of his *glory*, whether to a Balaam who saw his glory afar off—to Peter who was an “eye-witness of his majesty”—to Saul when he was struck with blindness, or to John who “fell at his feet as dead”—all is in harmony with his own revelation of the mysterious constitution of his person, as well as with the prerogatives of his mediatorship : *I am he that liveth and was dead : and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death.*”*

In his death the infirmity of that nature which he had taken on himself was clearly made known : he was the *Son of Man*. In his resurrection the high nature which he had from the beginning with God, though veiled for a season “under the form of a servant,” was illustriously vindicated from the aspersions of his enemies : demonstrated, published and declared to the world.

“He was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead :”† power

* Rev. i. 18.

† Rom. i. 14.

to “lead captivity captive,” to return to “the glory which he had with the Father before the world was,” and according to his word, “to send the Comforter” to his sorrowing disciples: power to commission his disciples “to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;” to “convince” the world “of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come;” to “gather his elect from the four winds of heaven;” to raise the dead at the last day; and “to judge the world in righteousness”—“whereof God hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead:” * power to separate the righteous from the wicked; to exalt his believing followers “to be kings and priests unto God,” and to “put all enemies under his feet:” power to be with his disciples “even unto the end of the world;” aye, to fulfil his promise to all who believe on his name, that where he is *there* shall they be also.

Hence it was that on his rising from the dead,—disprove it who can?—a *new power* entered into the world’s history; and he himself became a *living power* in the soul of every believer.

It will be recollected that Jesus spoke of the manner of his decease which should be accomplished at Jerusalem, as well as stated the time of his resurrection; and it is no less clear from the fact of his resurrection that he was the “*Lamb of God*” than “the Son of God.”

* Acts xvii. 31.

Leave out of view the wondrous constitution of his person as developed in the history of his life, and attested by the fact of his coming to life again in accordance with his own word ; and there is no more significancy in his death than in that of any other man, as has been already intimated. If a mere man he could not have atoned for his own sins ;—for sins he must have had, notwithstanding the perfection ascribed to him, had he not been born of a miraculous conception ; and sooner or later he too must have died in obedience to the law of mortality.

Were it necessary in this connection it might be shown that no view of Christ's death can be right which is at variance with his sinless perfection, and the relation which he sustained to the Father ; much less which proceeds on the supposition that sin is no evil, or that God is not a King as well as a Father ; which denies either the equity or the love of God : thus either subverting ethical distinctions, or destroying the force of law ; while failing necessarily to harmonize the outgoings of mercy with the demands of justice.

It might be shown, moreover, from the teachings of the sacred records, (and independently of *these*, no man's opinion of the nature and design of Christ's death is deserving of a moment's thought,) that his death was a voluntary act of humiliation : " he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross ;" that he did

not die merely to attest the truth of his doctrines; for the mighty works to which he had previously referred had already attested the divine origin of his mission; and had this been the primary design of his death, it could not have been consistently said of him any more than of the martyr Stephen or James that "he redeemed us with his blood," or "gave his life a ransom for many."

Much less is it reasonable to infer from the teachings of the Scriptures, that he died merely to set us an example of patience and resignation, or even that he died to obtain the power of forgiving sin, and give us an assurance of eternal life: even had he not previously given sufficient proof of his power in these respects, or ever exemplified the passive virtues, it is evident that such an example might have been given, and such lessons effectively taught without God's subjecting an innocent being to cruel sufferings.

From the terms employed by the Evangelists as descriptive of his passion, he must have suffered—not in his body, but in his mind more than any other man ever did or can; and yet being sinless he had no grounds for self-reproach. Having lived solely for others' good, in his case there could have been no disturbing thoughts for some wrong done, or any private end defeated. He too who had boldly faced the traitor, and calmly, silently met the charges of the Sanhedrim, could not have been afraid to die; nor could he have been unresigned

to his Father's will who was conscious of the ultimate triumph of his cause ; and yet it would seem from the narrative that "never was there sorrow like unto his sorrow."

Certain it is that any one else would have shrunk back from the scenes through which he passed. He was alone in this Gethsemane hour of his mysterious forebodings : alone in the final scene of his inscrutable agony : in the phenomena of his death just as separate from human kind as he was in the circumstances of his birth, or, as we have seen, in the constitution of his person.

Why he was constrained "to tread the wine-press of sorrow ;" or what the precise nature of his sufferings, is but imperfectly known. The accepted formula of the church that he died to atone for sin advances us but a step beyond the threshold of inquiry. In any point of view it is a great mystery—a stupendous problem—not to be resolved by the finite mind ; but most assuredly we know one thing about it—if but one ; and which we should not have known had Christ not risen from the grave to become *his own interpreter* of his dying sufferings : and that is, that his death was not a mischance ; nor the inevitable result of hell's devices against "the Lord's Anointed ;" but an unavoidable moral necessity under God's government : the appointment of Infinite wisdom and love ; predetermined in the divine councils ; preceded by a long series of preparations, embracing a great variety of

agencies ; and that by virtue of “ the propitiation for sin ”* God can “ be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.”

“ Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory ? ” said Jesus to the desponding disciples the very same day of his resurrection : “ And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. And said unto them : Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer ; and to rise from the dead the third day. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”†

Hence the atonement lies at the basis of the Christian System : its final proof rests immoveably on the great fact of the Resurrection ; and the doctrine “ of Justification by faith,” inseparably associated as it is with Christ’s resurrection,‡ proclaims to dying sinners the gracious *end* for which he was raised from the dead.

Thus “ the mystery that was hid for ages ” is unveiled in the light of the resurrection morn. He who came forth from the sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea, where his body was laid after that he was crucified, is exalted to be A PRINCE, AND A SAVIOUR.§

So thought, so felt “ the chosen witnesses,” as is

* Rom. iii. 25, 26.

† Luke xxiv. 27, 46, 47.

‡ Rom. iv. 25.

§ Acts v. 31.

evident from the various references to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, everywhere scattered throughout the Acts and Epistles of the sacred writers.

The resurrection served not merely to disabuse their minds of all their earth-born conceptions of the Messiah of promise; but to impress them with a profounder sense of his claims on their love and devotions: the true dignity—the transcendent glory of their blessed Master, notwithstanding the indignities and ignominy to which he had been subjected.

That hour of darkness which came over the innocent Sufferer as he drew nigh his end, is now seen to have been but the eclipse of “the Sun of righteousness.”

What, though his murderers should cast it into their teeth that the God whom they adored was a crucified malefactor:—they had seen him after he was risen from the dead; had been instructed by him in all things pertaining to his kingdom; had been clothed with a Divine commission; had been assured by him who had given them incontestable evidence of his ability to keep his word that he had gone “to prepare a place for them in his Father’s mansions;” and looking back on the teachings of his entire history, and remembering at once his example and his promise,—oh with what meekness do they receive the taunts and jeers of their blinded enemies! with what sincerity of convic-

tion do they exclaim, not only in the face of ridicule and contempt, but of death in its direst forms: “*We count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord!*”

So may we. Though we can but read and ponder the sacred narratives, we know that the resurrection of Jesus is attested by historical and moral evidence no less conclusive than ocular demonstration. We feel that there is nothing in the annals of our race; nothing in all history worthy of credence, if it be not a fact that Christ rose from the dead.

Despite therefore the sneers of a godless world, the rationalism of schools, or the malign sophistry, the brazen effrontery, the debasing insinuations of modern sensualism, the humiliation of Jesus need be no rock of offence to us. We have nothing to dread but the suggestions of that “evil heart” which rendered the disciples even when they “saw the Lord,” so “slow to believe;” and which now blinds so many minds lest they should behold “the King in his glory.”

All is clear and bright—resplendently glorious about the man Christ Jesus, if we but turn our eye from the garden of Gethsemane to the garden *in which there was a sepulchre*; from the place of skulls to yonder mountain in Galilee;* from Golgotha to Bethany.†

* Matt. xxviii. 16–18.

† Luke xxiv. 50.

Lo! the scandal of the cross has been wiped away! We can now worship Him even at the foot of the cross. When his soul seems to sink and die within him under the inconceivable pressure of his heavy burden; when he cries out as if in agony, of his conscious abandonment by both God and man—even *then*,—oh stupendous and blessed paradox!—and never so humbly as then—shall we look up to him as the *Lord our God* whom principalities and powers obey and worship; who left “the glory which he had with the Father before the world was,” and “became flesh,” and shed his blood “a ransom for many;” “who for the *joy* that was set before him in bringing many sons unto glory *endured the cross, despising the shame.*”

It became Him therefore to say;—and no one but he could have so affirmed with all the solemnity of actual prescience;—“*He that believeth in me shall never die.*”

His resurrection becomes at once the *seal* and *pledge* of the resurrection of his people. “If Christ is risen, so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” The Head living for ever, the members shall live also. The first fruits being gathered in, the harvest must follow.

“For ever blessed, then, be the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of

Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God *through faith unto salvation.*”

THE END.

Date Due

[illegible]

BS2427 .D55

The resurrection of Jesus Christ

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00013 3480